

WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF VERBAL ASPECT THEORY IN  
CIAMPA AND ROSNER'S COMMENTARY  
ON FIRST CORINTHIANS

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to discern the actual benefits and liabilities of Verbal Aspect Theory (VAT) for NT exegesis by examining its application in Ciampa and Rosner's Commentary on 1 Corinthians. They apply VAT to four primary areas: the explanation of *Aktionsart*, time and verb tense, present and aorist imperatives, and the perfect tense. The article concludes that a helpful nuance is gained by the use of VAT, though some need for consistency and clarity remains. On the other hand, VAT may at times result in a flattened interpretation of Greek verbs because in some areas VAT provides limited interpretive options that do not always best explain the data.

KEY WORDS: Verbal Aspect Theory (VAT), *Aktionsart*, 1 Corinthians.

More than two decades have passed since Stanley Porter and Buist Fanning published their books on verbal aspect in NT Greek<sup>1</sup>. The great controversy over the topic often seems to have produced more heat than light. However, one litmus test for a theory should be the question of how it impacts our practice. In this case, it is important to raise the question of how the debate over verbal aspect theory (VAT) has actually affected the interpretation of NT. Has all the ink spilled over the topic really been justified? What are the benefits or dangers of adopting VAT? When the rubber meets the road—namely in the interpretation of actual texts—has the debate produced any light, in addition to the heat?

The goal of this paper is to ask, “What tangible results have the discussions about VAT yielded for NT exegesis?” I will examine this question in interaction with Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner's Pillar New Testament Commentary on 1 Corinthians<sup>2</sup>. One reason that Ciampa and Rosner's commentary provides such a good subject for analysis is because they believe that VAT is important enough to warrant four full pages in their introduction<sup>3</sup>.

In the first part of this article, I will examine the introduction to the commentary and summarize their main assertions about VAT. In the second section I will look at the body of the commentary in light of their stated position on VAT to



show how their theory impacts their practice. In the final section, I will summarize the main benefits and dangers that their use of VAT demonstrates.

## 1. ANALYSIS OF INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

There are four main headings under which their statements on VAT can be grouped.

1. *Aktionsart* (i.e. kind of action, such as ingressive, gnomic, constative, etc.) is a legitimate dimension of the text, but it is derived from the interaction between multiple facets of the text, such as the semantics (including aspect), lexeme, and context<sup>4</sup>. Ciampa and Rosner frame the discussion as follows: “Scholars have not been wrong to see punctilliar, continuous, iterative, gnomic, conative, or ingressive ideas in their texts. They have been wrong to think that the verbal tenses themselves express such distinct ideas”<sup>5</sup>. They believe, following much of the current thinking about verbal aspect, that these “kinds of actions” are a result of the interaction between various elements in the text, rather than being derived exclusively from the verb tense itself. Their appraisal of the relationship between verbal aspect and traditional categories of *Aktionsart* is in harmony with the opinion of Andrew David Naselli:

Embracing aspect theory . . . does not drastically change translations, exegesis, or doctrine. Its primary significance is that it changes how one expresses (and perhaps more importantly, now one does not express) an exegetical argument with reference to a verb’s tense-form. It is invalid to argue that a certain tense-form necessitates a particular pragmatic meaning. . . . While still reaching many of the same pragmatic distinctions . . . aspect theory adds a perspective to the exegesis of Greek verbs that is more nuanced, subtle, consistent, and genuinely explanatory<sup>6</sup>.

In other words, the traditional categories are useful, but need to be used within a framework that accounts for these meanings in light of the interaction between things

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<sup>1</sup> S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament: With Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York 1989); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford 1990).

<sup>2</sup> R.E. Ciampa and B.S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See the section, “The Use of Greek and the Question of Verbal Aspect”, in Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 42-46.

<sup>4</sup> *Aktionsart* is a term that is not used consistently in studies on verbal aspect. Here, I will use the term as Ciampa and Rosner use it (following Constantine Campbell), namely to refer to “various kinds of action” such as iterative, punctilliar, progressive, etc. (Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 43).

<sup>5</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 43.

<sup>6</sup> A.D. Naselli, “A Brief Introduction to Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek”, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 12 (2007) 25.



like verbal aspect, lexeme, and context, rather than saying that they are communicated by the tense of the verb alone.

2. *With regard to time they seem to believe—despite claims that time is not indicated by the tense at all—that there is in fact a “default temporal understanding” to the Greek verbal system unless it is cancelled by some contextual factor.* So they say,

Still [despite claims that there is no temporal significance to verb tense] it is usually admitted that although time may not be the essence of any of the tenses (except perhaps the future tense), a default temporal understanding is assumed except where it is clearly cancelled by some contextual indicators. It is probably in light of these default temporal significances that both ancient and modern Greeks have unanimously affirmed that temporal significance is normally communicated by Greek verbs<sup>7</sup>.

So according to their discussion in the introduction, they do believe that there is a temporal significance to verb tenses.

3. *Regarding aorist and present imperatives and subjunctives, they tentatively follow Campbell’s view, in which present imperatives generally indicate “general instruction”, while aorist imperatives generally indicate “specific instruction”:*

In his recent study of the verbal aspect of non-indicative verbs Con Campbell points out that while aorist imperatives are usually used for “specific instruction, which is instruction that is relevant to a specific situation,” and present imperatives are used for “general instruction, or instruction that is relevant to situations in general,” we sometimes find summary aorist imperatives where we would expect a present imperative and it is difficult to demonstrate “any meaningful difference” between them. Most of Paul’s uses of the aorist imperative in 1 Corinthians may be explained on the assumption that he has a particular case or situation in mind (5:7; 13; 10:15; 11:13; 15:34; 16:1, 11, 20) or that he hypothesizes about a potential specific case or situation (perhaps in 3:18; 7:9, 21; 11:6), but we would not claim that these explanations are certain, and they do not seem to cover all of the examples (see 6:20 and 7:11; in the latter case we have a present imperative and an aorist imperative side by side)<sup>8</sup>.

Note that there is an element of tentativeness about their comments here, but they generally follow this theory.

4. *Regarding the perfect tense, they tentatively view it as indicating a present state:*

Whether the perfect tense points to a present state due to belonging to a stative aspectual category (as argued by Porter and McKay) or by way of expressing particular kind of action (*Aktionsart*) often implicated by that tense (and whether it is a reflec-

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<sup>7</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 45.

tion of an imperfective aspect [as Campbell argues] or perfective aspect and present tense [as argued by Olsen]), it most often stresses a present state of affairs<sup>9</sup>.

Though they note that its place in the verbal aspect system is debated by scholars, and though they seem somewhat tentative on the issue themselves, they reason that it is safe to say that the perfect tense “most often stresses a present state of affairs”<sup>10</sup>.

These four points raised in the introduction help the reader to identify Ciampa and Rosner’s main areas of concern when it comes to the tense of the Greek verb. The next section will examine their interpretation of the Greek verb in their comments on 1 Corinthians in light of the view that they express in the introduction.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT DISCUSSIONS IN THE COMMENTARY

In the actual comments that Ciampa and Rosner make on the text of 1 Corinthians, their comments related to verbal aspect tend to be focused on the four areas of concern identified in the introductory comments. Therefore, the following discussion will be grouped according to the four headings from the above section.

1. *Aktionsart is attributable to a complex of features.* As explained above, Ciampa and Rosner view the traditional *Aktionsart* categories (i.e. “kinds of action”) as valid. However, rather than attributing them to the verb tense alone, they believe that *Aktionsart* should be explained on the basis of multiple factors, such as tense, lexeme, and context. When looking at the commentary itself, there seem to be many occasions when their comments reflect this way of thinking, and as a result, they give a helpful, nuanced discussion. Other times, their comments are consistent with this view, even if they don’t show explicitly how these various factors contribute to the meaning. In a handful of cases, their comments are unclear about the relationship between the two, or give the appearance of contradicting their stated position.

One example of a helpful nuance in their discussion is found in their comments on 1 Corinthians 1,21<sup>11</sup>. There they say,

*Did not know him* reflects an aorist indicative verb (Gk. ἔγνων). The verb γινώσκω can have a dynamic sense (as in “arrive at a knowledge of” or “acquire information” [BDAG]) or a stative sense (as in “be aware of”). The perfective verbal aspect of

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<sup>9</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 45-46.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> All subsequent chapter and verse references are from 1 Corinthians unless otherwise noted.

the aorist tense-form often combines with stative verbs to express the entrance into a state. An inceptive idea is likely here even if the dynamic lexical idea is in mind. Either way the idea would be that “the world did not come to know God through wisdom”<sup>12</sup>.

Their comments are helpful here because they show that the lexeme (γινώσκω) combines with the aspect of the tense-form to convey inceptive *Aktionsart*. While their knowledge of verbal aspect does not result in a completely new interpretation of the passage, it does help the reader understand in a more nuanced way just “how” the passage means what it means here.

Another example of the helpful nuance that is added by their use of VAT can be found in their comments on 2,14:

“Does not welcome” represents a present indicative verb . . . the imperfective aspect of which (in light of the context, which suggests that the nature of spiritual or unspiritual people consistently dictates whether they respond one way or the other) is expressing a gnomic idea here, how things always happen, given their very nature<sup>13</sup>.

Here they explain that the passage is conveying a gnomic idea; however, that gnomic idea is not expressed by the present tense in and of itself, but rather the imperfective aspect combines with the context to convey the gnomic action. As these comments show, their view of VAT adds a welcomed nuance to their explanations of the interpretation of the Greek verb<sup>14</sup>.

An example of comments that are compatible with their view of verbal aspect, but do not show explicitly how the various elements in the text interact with one another is found in their discussion of 1,22-25, where they say:

Throughout this section, a string of present indicatives is employed to describe the parties involved. These present indicatives should not slavishly be interpreted as expressing ongoing actions in process. Rather, the imperfective aspect of these verbs is being used to portray gnomic (or possibly customary) descriptions, in which a general state of affairs (or a general tendency of a given group) is affirmed: “Jews ask for a sign,” “Greeks seek wisdom” (v. 22); “we preach Christ crucified” (v. 23); “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom” (v. 25)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 96, n.35, italics original.

<sup>13</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 135, n.65.

<sup>14</sup> Other passages in the commentary similar to those discussed above are p. 110, n.90; p. 128, n.35; p. 154, n.44; p. 178, n.47; p. 195, n.29; p. 217, n.123; p. 243, n.92; p. 277; p. 292-93, n.112; p. 309, n.186; p. 320, n.339; p. 471-72, n.200; p. 521, n.68; p. 539, n.137; p. 549, n.170; p. 657, n.201; p. 690, n.101; p. 748, n.51; p. 795, n.220; p. 850, n.27.

<sup>15</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 99, n.47.



Notice in this quote that rather than saying that the present tense *means* gnomic (or customary) action, they explain that the imperfective aspect of the present tense is being *used to portray gnomic* (or customary) descriptions (i.e. *Aktionsart*). This is fully consistent with the position that is set out in the introduction, and seen in the previous examples. However, they don't explain here the other factors that lead them to attribute this kind of action to the verbs.

A similar example is their comment on 2,6-7: "The repetition of λαλοῦμεν ('we speak/declare') in 2:6 and 2:7 reflects the use of imperfective aspect in order to express a customary action, characterizing the nature of apostolic preaching: we speak wisdom"<sup>16</sup>. Again, they speak of how the verb "reflects the *use* of the imperfective aspect to *express* a customary action". They do not attribute the customary action to the verb tense itself; also again, however, they do not explain here how other factors contribute to this *Aktionsart*. This is consistent with their comments in the introduction in which they show an openness to rearticulate the traditional *Aktionsart* categories in light of their theory of verbal aspect, but again they do not explicitly show in these passages how the various features of the text (such as tense, lexeme and context) combine to convey a particular kind of action<sup>17</sup>.

While the majority of their discussions regarding *Aktionsart*, as shown above, either add helpful nuance or are at least consistent with their view of VAT, some passages seem either unclear about the relationship between aspect and *Aktionsart*, or appear to attribute the kind of time to the tense itself, in apparent contradiction to their claims in the introduction.

An example of a passage that seems unclear about the relationship between aspect and *Aktionsart* is found in their comments on 2,13:

Verses 13–16 once again employ present indicatives, which express their imperfective aspect through gnomic (or in some cases customary) descriptions: "we speak these things"; "natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit"; "it is foolishness to him"; "he is not able to know it"; "the spiritual man evaluates everything"; "he is not evaluated by anyone"; "we have the mind of Christ"<sup>18</sup>.

This comment seems to lack clarity in its expression of the relationship between the imperfective aspect and gnomic action. What does it mean that the verbs "express their imperfective aspect through gnomic (or in some cases customary) descriptions"? In light of their statements in the introduction, might it not be better to say that the verbs "create gnomic descriptions" or "express gnomic action" through

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<sup>16</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 122, n.12.

<sup>17</sup> Other similar passages in the commentary are the following: p. 85, n.96; p. 132, n.54; p. 146, n.11; p. 234, n.54; p. 436, n.15; p. 477.

<sup>18</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 132, n.54.



the imperfective aspect? If one were not already aware of the issues regarding verbal aspect, this could conceivably be a confusing statement<sup>19</sup>.

An example of a passage that appears to attribute the kind of time to the tense itself is found in their comments on 1,18. They say,

*Perishing*, a powerful word meaning “to be ruined or destroyed,” is a temporal reference (“those in the process of perishing”) rather than being determinative (“those who will perish ultimately”). The present tense represents the activity as in process. In other words, perishing refers to the present road those who reject the message are on and not necessarily to their final destiny<sup>20</sup>.

If by the tense “represent[ing] the activity as in process” they are saying that the tense communicates progressive action, then at least in this example, they would appear to be contradicting what they said in the introduction about the “kind of action” being a result of the combination of elements such as lexeme, semantics, and context. Certainly, to read this passage charitably, since the authors have made their position on verbal aspect clear at the beginning of the commentary, they likely do not mean that they think the tense in itself communicates progressive action; yet it does seem to show a bit of inconsistency with the position they stated in the introduction.

A similar example is found in their comments on 7,15: “Paul’s imperative is one of toleration or, as Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 488, suggests, it ‘could almost be called “an imperative of resignation,”’ which is often used for an act which is seen as a *fait accompli*”<sup>21</sup>. Here again they seem to attribute *Aktionsart* to the verb itself. Even if we know from the introduction that they ultimately view the “kind of action” as a result of multiple factors, their actual comments do not sound very different from the traditional approach that has been criticized by proponents of VAT for making it sound as if *Aktionsart* is communicated by the verb alone<sup>22</sup>.

The comments quoted above show that, regarding *Aktionsart*, this commentary has (for the most part) integrated VAT well. The majority of the places where

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<sup>19</sup> See also p. 234, n.54 and p. 436, n.15 for two other similar comments.

<sup>20</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 302, n.151.

<sup>22</sup> For another example of this kind of comment, see also p. 188, n.103, where they comment on 4,17, saying, “In this case ἔπεμψα would be an epistolary aorist and would best be translated, ‘I am sending’”. This also seems to be an inconsistency; however compare this to similar comments on p. 217, n.123 (in which they comment on 5,11), where they more carefully ground this category in the combination of verbal aspect and context: “Paul uses what is called an epistolary aorist (ἐγγραψα) by which the perfective aspect of the aorist views the activity of writing the letter (which was not even halfway complete at this point) as a (completed) whole, adopting the perspective of the readers after they received it (cf. BDF §334; Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 562-63)”.

verb tense is discussed with regard to “kind of time”, their comments either enlighten the reader to the multiple factors that combine to express the *Aktionsart*, or are at least consistent with their stated position on it. There are only a handful of places where their comments are either unclear or at least give the appearance of being inconsistent with the position that they established in the introduction.

2. *Default temporal understanding of verb tense.* The second topic they commented on in the introduction is the idea that the verb has a default temporal significance unless contextual features cancel it out. Their comments fall into two groups: the first includes comments that imply or assume the default temporal understanding of the verb tense; the second includes comments that explain the exceptions to the default temporal significance.

Their discussion of 6,11 are an example of comments that assume a default temporal significance: “Paul uses a series of aorist indicatives in v. 11 to undergird moral behavior with the past facts of cleansing, sanctifying, and justifying (ἀπελούσασθε; ἡγιασθητε; ἐδικαιώθητε)”<sup>23</sup>. Here the aorist tense-form is assumed to indicate past action in light of the default temporal significance of the aorist tense.

Similarly, note their comments on 10,18:

The use of the present tense participle to refer to the people Paul has in mind (“those who eat”), as well as the present indicative verb (“are participants”), seems to suggest that Paul had the present experience of his own day in mind, or a general (“gnomic”) principle in mind rather than some specific previous event<sup>24</sup>.

Here they connect the present tense with either present-time action, or gnomic, timeless action (another standard application of the present tense). In addition, they go on to make the following helpful statement in a footnote on this section:

Although present time is not the essence of present tense verbs (and the normal temporal significance of indicative verbs is cancelable), there is nothing in the context here to indicate to the reader that the normal temporal understanding is cancelled. Paul’s readers might have expected some such linguistic clue if he expected them to understand his reference to be to something that was no longer the case<sup>25</sup>.

Among all of the authors’ comments on the temporal significance of the verb tense, this one most clearly expresses their view on the matter. It is completely in harmony with their view of verb tense stated in the introduction, and explicitly states that they believe that the Greek verb normally indicates time, and that this time element is not

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<sup>23</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 243, n.92.

<sup>24</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 477.

<sup>25</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 477, n.227.





absolute but cancellable. So despite recent protests that the Greek verbal system has no reference to time, they are apparently comfortable with the idea that there is normally a temporal element<sup>26</sup>.

The second, and more numerous group of comments consists of a series of passages in which they discuss the occurrences of verb tense that have a temporal significance other than the default. For example, in their comments on 3,13, they say that

The verb translated *will be revealed* (ἀποκαλύπτεται) is a present indicative set in a future-referring context. Indeed, the indicative verbs surrounding this present are all in the future tense. This present is always translated as though future-referring, and is best taken this way. Present tense verbs are sometimes used with future reference in describing events that are pre-planned or pre-determined (as in those determined by God's eschatological plan, as here)<sup>27</sup>.

This is a good example of their understanding of the temporal dimension of the Greek verb in a situation which the default time is cancelled out by contextual factors. In this case, the time is determined by the combination of tense, lexeme, and context. It shows their understanding that time is one part of the total meaning, but also that context and lexeme and tense all combine to convey the time. The default temporal significance of the tense can be cancelled out by other factors in the text.

Similar comments are found in their comments on 5,13. They first note that the verb κρινεῖ could be either future or present tense, but after they settle on the present tense, they then note that "Even a future tense would be ambiguous, not necessarily signaling an exclusively future reference, as in the last sentence of the paragraph above: 'God will sovereignly discipline'"<sup>28</sup>. Here, the tenses are assumed to indicate time, though the time significance is viewed as cancellable in light of other contextual factors (in this case, the future tense may not be exclusively future-referring)<sup>29</sup>.

The above examination of Ciampa and Rosner's discussions on the temporal significance of the Greek verb shows that they are consistent with their stated view that verb tense has a default temporal significance unless it is cancelled out by other factors. It is interesting that when they actually discuss the temporal significance, more of their discussions are on the exceptions rather than the default uses, however

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<sup>26</sup> See also p. 154, n.44, where they show that they assume the future tense normally communicates future time.

<sup>27</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 154, n.44, italics original.

<sup>28</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 220, n.135.

<sup>29</sup> For other examples, see p. 178, n.47, p. 254, n.42, and p. 845, n.16.

this is to be expected because it is the exceptions that have need of explanation, whereas the default uses will tend to be self-evident and will only be discussed when they are exegetically significant.

3. *Aorist imperatives indicate specific instruction, and present imperatives indicate general instruction.* The third topic they comment on in the introduction has to do with the present and aorist imperatives<sup>30</sup>. As mentioned above, their introduction presents a tentative adoption of Constantine Campbell's approach in which present imperatives are viewed as indicating general instructions and aorist imperatives are viewed as indicating specific commands (though they admit in the introduction that not every example seems to fit this theory)<sup>31</sup>.

In many of their comments on the imperative, they apply Campbell's paradigm in a straightforward way. For example, in their comments on 3,10 they comment as follows on the present imperative:

Paul uses a third-person present imperative (βλεπέτω). Present imperatives normally indicate some kind of general action. This is a regular expression of imperfective aspect within commands—action is to be taken with reference to situations in general. Here the sense of the imperative is that all who seek to build the church upon the foundation already laid must generally take care as they do so<sup>32</sup>.

Here they simply apply Campbell's model, and it seems to be a convincing explanation for this passage. A good argument can be made that here, the present imperative is used to express general instruction<sup>33</sup>.

They also follow Campbell's view on the aorist imperative, which is expressed in comments like the one on 5,7: "Paul uses an aorist imperative here (ἐκκαθάρατε, 'clean out'; *get rid of*), since he has a specific case and situation in mind (the man who has his father's wife)"<sup>34</sup>. This is representative of their statements on the aorist

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<sup>30</sup>They also mention the aorist and present subjunctives in the introduction, but I noticed very few comments on the subjunctive in the actual comments on the text, and nothing that highlighted the role of verbal aspect.

<sup>31</sup> See Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 45, where they say, "we would not claim that these explanations are certain, and they do not seem to cover all of the examples (see 6:20 and 7:11; in the latter case we have a present imperative and an aorist imperative side by side)". For Campbell's approach to verbal aspect in the imperative mood, see C.R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI 2008); id., *Verbal Aspect and Non-indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 152, n.35.

<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in their comments on 3,18, they state, "The phrase Μεδεις εαυτον εξαπατατω (Do not deceive yourselves) indicates a general action, to be adhered to in situations in general. This is a normal implicature of the imperfective aspect of present imperatives" (p. 162, n.72). This is again a standard application of Campbell's theory with regard to the present imperative.

<sup>34</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 213, n.108.



imperative, in which they view it as expressing specific instruction<sup>35</sup>. As can be seen from the above discussion, with regard to both the aorist and present imperative they seem to follow Constantine Campbell's approach fairly closely.

On the other hand, while in the majority of their comments they directly apply Campbell's theory, their analysis of 1 Corinthians also shows that not every imperative fits their paradigm. In a number of such cases, they note that in the imperative mood, some lexemes are only known to be found with one particular tense, indicating the possibility that the use of a given tense in the imperative may be idiomatic rather than an intentional choice between two options.

One example of their approach in such cases can be seen in their comments on 7,11, where they say,

Paul's use of the aorist passive imperative here (καταλλαγήτω) is interesting, but *TLG* indicates that present imperatival forms of this verb do not appear until the fourth century A.D., suggesting little should be made of the aorist here. This probably reflects a standard idiomatic usage of the verb or an intuitive understanding of the relationship between lexical and verbal aspect (see Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 340–79, for a full discussion of exceptions to the rule). In fact, all but one of the following imperatives in this chapter are present imperatives, consistent with the understanding that he is providing generally relevant moral instruction rather than teaching that is expected to be applied to just the particular case at hand. The one exception is the aorist χρήσαι in v. 21, but *TLG* points out that the verb does not appear in the second-person singular present middle imperative in all of Greek literature, suggesting that Paul's use of the aorist in that verse is also unremarkable<sup>36</sup>.

In other words, even though καταλλαγήτω (and χρήσαι) are aorist imperatives, they are not functioning as specific instruction (as aorists normally do) because interpreting these verbs as indicating specific instruction does not appear to fit this context. Added to that is the fact that these particular words are not found in the present imperative in other Greek literature of the time, indicating that the aorist imperative is simply the default tense used with the imperative of these words. As a

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<sup>35</sup> See also their comments on 7,9: "They should marry is an aorist imperative (γαμησάτωσαν) since Paul is describing the proper response to a specific situation" (p. 288, n.87) which is another example of their standard comments on the aorist imperative, following Campbell. For more examples of these kinds of comments on the present and aorist imperative, see also p. 165, n.91; p. 169, n.1; p. 173, n.21; p. 187, n.100; p. 262, n.78; p. 296, n.123; p. 309, n.189; p. 390, n. 87; p. 437, n.18; p. 443, n.57; p. 470, n.193; p. 537, n.132; p. 551, n.175; p. 615, n.254; p. 734, n.260; p. 791, n.204; p. 839, n.1; p. 852, n.35; p. 854, n.40; p. 860, n.6; p. 863, n.69. Note that the majority of comments on the imperative are similar to the ones discussed above in which Campbell's theory is applied in a straightforward manner.

<sup>36</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 292-93, n.112.

result, they argue that we should not look for any particular significance in the choice of the aorist tense, since it does not appear to be an intentional choice between two options in the language system<sup>37</sup>. As a result, even though the tense used with these verbs is unexpected, they are able to account for this exception on the basis of lexeme.

A similar situation is found when they discuss the aorist imperative in 11,6, where they say:

This verb (κειράσθω) is an aorist imperative, whereas *she should cover her head* (later in the verse) is a present imperative. Either an aorist or a present would make sense (the aorist due to the summarizing nature of its perfective aspect or because Paul has a particular situation in mind, or the present because he is providing a general rule for how such a scenario should be handled). *TLG* indicates that there are no cases of the present imperative in the middle and passive voices of κείρω (which is the expected alternative) in all of Greek literature (probably due to the relationship between lexical and verbal aspect). So Paul's use of the aorist is probably not of exegetical significance. Paul is providing a general rule for how such a scenario should be handled<sup>38</sup>.

Here again they explain the use of the aorist imperative based on the relationship between the tense and lexeme, suggesting that this is simply the default tense for this word<sup>39</sup>.

They find these unexpected aorist imperatives more frequently than they find unexpected present imperatives. Nevertheless, they find at least one in 16,10 that they argue is explainable on the basis of lexeme:

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<sup>37</sup> Their comments are similar for the verb χρέσαι in v. 21: “Gk. χράω. Here we find a second-person singular aorist middle imperative form of the verb (χρήσαι). It has been pointed out earlier that this is the only imperative that is not a present imperative from v. 12 until the end of the chapter (see also the comment on καταλλαγήτω in v. 11). According to *TLG*, a second-person singular present middle imperative form of this verb does not appear in all of Greek literature, suggesting that Paul's use of the aorist here is unremarkable” (pp. 320-21, n.239).

<sup>38</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 521, n.68.

<sup>39</sup> Another similar example is found in their comments on 15,38: “The first verb is an aorist imperative (ἐκνήψατε, from ἐκνήψω), and the second a present imperative (ἀμαρτάνετε, from ἀμαρτάνω). But *TLG* indicates that ἐκνήψω does not appear as a present active imperative in all of Greek literature (probably due to the relationship between verbal aspect and the verb's lexical aspect), suggesting that we should not make an issue of Paul's use of the aorist here” (p. 795, n.220). This comment, as with those above, highlights the contribution of lexeme to choice of tense. They suggest that the aorist imperative is the default tense for the lexeme ἐκνήψω, and so, again, not exegetically significant.

Paul uses a present active imperative (βλέπετε), which seems surprising at first since Timothy's reception appears to be a specific situation (which would normally be addressed with an aorist imperative). It could be argued that watching to make sure that Timothy was well received was not a particular act and that that motivated the use of the present imperative. It is probably more relevant to mention that according to *TLG* the second person plural aorist active imperative form of the verb (βλέψατε) does not appear in Greek literature until the fourth century, and that βλέπετε seems to have been the standard form for exhorting a group to take care in some way. Thus Paul's use of this particular form turns out to be unremarkable<sup>40</sup>.

This comment, as with the aorist imperatives, highlights the role of lexeme in the author's choice of tense. According to Campbell's theory, a verb that communicates (what appears to be) a specific instruction should be found in the aorist tense; however they argue that it is in the present tense here because the present tense is the default for this particular word in this time period. As a result, the author's choice is constrained by the normal use of this word, and we should therefore attach no special significance to it.

With regard to this approach it is helpful that they show us, yet again, how the various factors of a text work together to convey meaning. The fact that a particular lexeme may account for a particular choice of tense helps us to understand in a more nuanced way how the authors communicate. On the other hand, it raises several issues. First of all, it is not obviously true that if a particular lexeme is used with only one tense, then that tense has no meaning<sup>41</sup>. While it may be an idiomatic usage, it does not follow that we can *assume* that there is no significance to the tense. It may be the case that the idiom includes the significance of the tense, as well as its form.

Second, this raises a methodological question. If the context and lexeme are used to explain exceptions, should they not be appealed to in *unexceptional* cases as well? It appears that for Ciampa and Rosner, the categories of general versus specific instruction are not merely two options among others, but rather the default options for interpreting verbs in the imperative mood. This approach runs the risk that of requiring every example to fit into one of two categories, when the evidence shows that these categories simply don't cover all every occurrence. This may be an example of the old adage that is so often true in biblical studies: "if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem look like a nail". But if there are numerous factors that explain the *exceptions* to the rule, it seems valid to wonder how those same factors

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<sup>40</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 850, n.27.

<sup>41</sup> Granted, this is an argument against the theory they are applying more than their application of it. Nevertheless, it seems important to raise these questions that come up as a result of their application of the theory.



might come into play in the *un*exceptional cases, and whether they might open up additional interpretive options that might be overlooked if it is assumed that every imperative will be an instance of either general or specific instruction.

These questions are only strengthened by some of the other examples which seem to sit uncomfortably with Campbell's view. For example, they comment on 3,18:

It *may* be that the aorist imperative (γενέσθω) is used because Paul considers someone thinking themselves wise by the standards of this age a specific situation to which they would need to respond. Or it could be a case of the perfective aspect of the aorist being “used to communicate instruction in summary form, which is thereby suited to general instruction” (Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 87)<sup>42</sup>.

Here they indicate that the aorist imperative could indicate either a specific situation or a general situation. While they think that interpreting it as a specific instruction is defensible on the basis of the default use of the aorist imperative, they seem to be hesitant to interpret it this way in light of the context. They mention the alternate possibility of interpreting it as a general instruction because the perfective aspect of the aorist allows the verb to express the action “in summary form”.

The reader is again struck with the fact that as far as the authors are concerned, general instruction and specific instruction appear to be the only two options considered here. In addition, if the aorist can be used for either general or specific instruction, is it legitimate to assume (as the authors seem to do) that aorists elsewhere are used for specific instruction unless contextual evidence proves otherwise? In addition, if the aorist imperative can be used for either general or specific instruction, in what way is the aorist imperative different from the present imperative? Why choose one over the other<sup>43</sup>?

Another case of the exegetical data sitting uncomfortably with their stated theory is found in their comments on 7,2. In the footnote, they give their standard comment: “The imperatives in this pericope (vv. 2, 3, 5; ἐχέτω; ἀχέτω; ἀποδιδότω; ἀποστερέϊτε) are all present imperatives, consistent with the generally relevant instruction Paul is providing on the subject”<sup>44</sup>. However, the comment in the body of the text reads as follows:

<sup>42</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 162-63, n.77, italics original.

<sup>43</sup> The same issues are present in their treatment of 6,20 where they comment, “Gk. δοξάζω. We would normally expect a present imperative here (rather than the aorist δοξάσατε) since the context does not suggest that Paul is addressing a specific case or situation rather than giving a generally relevant exhortation. It may be that Paul has the Corinthians' particular problems with sexual immorality in mind. Or this could be a case of an aorist imperative being used 'to communicate instruction in summary form'” (p. 266, n.94).

<sup>44</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 277, n.34.



“Each one should have.” The verb is usually used in the indicative mood to refer to the present or prior existence of an established marriage (“he has/had a wife”), while the verb “to take” is normally used for the establishment of a new marriage. *Here the imperatives for each one to “have” his own wife suggests the maintenance of sexual relations from time to time*<sup>45</sup>.

Again they cite mood and lexeme as important to understanding the meaning of the word. However, their comments seem to give two different interpretations for this passage. In the footnote, their explanation seems to be that the present tense is used because it is “generally relevant”. But in the main comment, they seem to undercut this interpretation by stating that the imperative indicates maintenance of sexual relations “from time to time”, which seems to indicate some kind of iterative action is being commanded. If this is correct, then there seems to be good reason to suggest that there are more interpretive categories available for understanding the Greek imperative than general and specific instruction.

A similar example in which their comments seem to reveal the inadequacy of the general/specific instruction paradigm is found in their comments on 16,1-2:

Paul uses an aorist imperative in this verse but then a present imperative in v. 2. Either the aorist is used based on the summarizing force of its perfective aspect (see Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 86–88), or Paul is thinking here (in summary terms) of the project as a whole as a specific activity to be done (and in the following verse the present imperative reflects the fact that the instruction has to do not with one particular act but with an ongoing practice, perhaps one that will continue even after this particular collection has been completed)<sup>46</sup>.

The problem in this verse seems to be that the same action is commanded using an aorist imperative in v. 1, and a present imperative in v. 2. Their comments on the “summarizing force” of the perfective aspect seem appropriate (i.e. the action is viewed as a whole, or simply), but when they speak of the present tense as commanding an “ongoing practice”, they seem to be indicating something less like “general instruction” and something more like an instruction to carry out an iterative action.

One possible way of making sense of these two commands is to view the aorist imperative as commanding the action as a whole using the perfective aspect (Paul simply commands them to do it) while the present imperative indicates that they are to make their collection an ongoing (iterative) practice each week when they gather. This interpretation of the present imperative, which seems to be close

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<sup>45</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 277, italics added.

<sup>46</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 842, n.9.



to what Ciampa and Rosner are arguing for, is not the same as speaking of general instruction, and again calls into question the sufficiency of the assumption that every imperative will fall into the category of either general or specific instruction. Specifically, several of these examples have shown that a category such as “iterative command” should be an additional option alongside of general instruction when interpreting the present imperative.

In conclusion, their comments on the imperative generally apply Campbell’s view in a straightforward way, which is consistent with what they claimed in the introduction. Although they acknowledge that this paradigm does not cover all of the examples, they still appear to use general versus specific instruction as their default interpretive options. While an examination of the text shows that these two options are valid, the exceptions to this paradigm provide evidence that these two options alone are insufficient to account for all of the uses of verbs in the imperative mood. Rather, other interpretive options such as something like an “iterative command” ought to be considered alongside of general and specific instruction, and further work could be done to explore how factors such as context and lexeme contribute to our interpretation of all of the uses of the imperative rather than simply the ones appear to be exceptions.

4. *Perfect tense indicates present state.* The fourth topic they address in their introduction is the use of the perfect tense. According to their somewhat tentative comments in the introduction, they believe that despite the difficulties regarding the perfect tense, we can at least say that it is most often used to indicate a present state of affairs. An examination of their comments in the body of their commentary show that they apply this consistently in their treatment of the text with a handful of exceptions.

One example of a straightforward application of their theory is their discussion on 1,19, where they say,

This is the first time in the letter that Paul uses the introductory formula *it is written* to introduce a quotation from Scripture. The formula uses a perfect indicative verb (γέγραπται). This verb is always translated to reflect the idea of a present stative concept (“it is written”) in keeping with the focus of the perfect tense. The use of the formula also tends to highlight the importance and authority of the quoted text<sup>47</sup>.

This is a textbook example of the perfect as indicating a state of affairs. This example reflects their stated position on the perfect tense, and is characteristic of almost all of their comments on the perfect tense<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 93, n.19.

<sup>48</sup> Another good example is found in their comments on 7,27: “The perfect passive indicatives ‘bound’ and ‘loosed/free’ (δέδεσαι; λέλυσαι) refer, as is usual with perfect verbs, to the current state of their subject” (p. 338, n.328). For other examples, see: p. 55; p. 76, n.42; p. 82, n.78; p. 85, n.96; p. 99, n.48; p. 110, n.89; p. 110, n.90; p. 173, n.19; p. 178, n.47; p. 290, n.97; p. 297, n.130; p. 302, n.154; p. 310, n.191; p. 334, n.300; p. 393, n.101; p. 518, n.57; p. 743, n.31; p. 761, n.86; p. 774, n.138.



One thing that is helpful for grasping the authors' perspective is to observe a couple of passages in which they claim that VAT presents a substantially clearer understanding of the text than a traditional understanding. For example, they comment on 7,14, "But in what sense has the unbelieving spouse actually *been sanctified*, or made holy, by their Christian husband or wife?"<sup>49</sup> This is explained in detail in the following footnote:

The perfect indicative ἡγιάσται occurs twice in v. 14. It had been thought that the perfect tense "combines in itself, so to speak, the present and the aorist in that it denotes the *continuance of completed action*" (BDF §340) so that the verb tense itself would indicate here that the unbelieving spouse has been made holy through their marriage (which would be the completed action with a continuing effect). More recent studies of verbal aspect have suggested, however, that what the perfect expresses is the current status of the marriage relationship and the fact that it is regarded as holy by the Lord. As such, it is a description of the unbeliever that is communicated by the choice of tense, not how or when this change of state took place. These perfects, therefore, are best and most naturally rendered as "is sanctified"<sup>50</sup>.

In their interpretation of the verb tense they argue that the tense indicates a focus on the present state of the verb. Here, this interpretation seems to fit well since, as they point out, the focus is on the "description of the unbeliever" rather than "how or when this change of state took place".

A similar idea is expressed in their comments on 7,15: "*Not bound* here refers to freedom to remarry"<sup>51</sup>. They continue in the footnote: "The use of the perfect tense here (δεδούλωται) provides a fine illustration of its focus on a present state. The idea is not that he has not been bound, but on the person's unbound state—he 'is not bound'"<sup>52</sup>. Again, in their comments on 7,34, they say,

Gk. μεμέρισται, perfect indicative passive of μέριζω, which refers, once again, to the present state of the subject. The concerns of a married man are divided. There is no hint of a past action leading to this state, as traditional analyses tended to assume. Rather, the perfect tense is being used to describe the current situation of the subject<sup>53</sup>.

With each of these example, the authors make a good argument for a focus on the present state of the verb.

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<sup>49</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 297, italics original.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, n.130, italics original.

<sup>51</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 302.

<sup>52</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 302, n.154.

<sup>53</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 352, n.388.



However, traditional views have long been able to accept that there is often a focus on the present state than the past action, or that there may be specific uses of the perfect that highlight the stative dimension. For example, David Alan Black's beginning grammar expresses the function of the perfect as follows: "The Greek perfect refers to a state resulting from a completed action. As such, the temporal focus is often more on the present than on the past, though the perfect depicts action that is already completed"<sup>54</sup>. Similarly, Wallace states that "The perfect may be used to *emphasize* the results or present state produced by a past action. The English present often is the best translation for such a perfect. This is a common use of the perfect tense"<sup>55</sup>. The difference is that Ciampa and Rosner's adoption of VAT seems to lead them to deny that the perfect tense includes a reference to the completed action in the past that brought about the present state.

This can be seen especially in a couple of examples in which they emphasize the present state even when there seems to be some implication for the past completed action that brought about the state. One example is found in their comments on 5,3:

*I have... passed judgment* is a translation of a perfect indicative verb (κέκρικα). Perfect verbs usually focus on the present state of affairs and not on past actions which brought that state into being. That would suggest that it might be better rendered "I am now decided," than "I have already judged" (the point not being that Paul previously made a decision, but that his mind is now made up). However, this may be pushing too hard. It appears that the present state to which the verb refers is that of one who has already rendered his judgment (the state a judge enters after giving his verdict, for which a language may or may not have a distinct term). Some present states of affairs may be expressed (in English, at least) only by reference to prior events which define them<sup>56</sup>.

While it seems to be defensible when they say that "perfect verbs usually focus on the present state of affairs"—inasmuch as "focus" need not totally exclude any relationship to a completed action—they seem to want to distance themselves from any indication that a completed action in the past is in view at all. But can we really do away with the idea of a completed action in the past in every use of the perfect tense? They seem to have difficulty doing so. (Notice their own statement here that to render the verb as "I am now decided . . . may be pushing too hard".)

Here they claim that "Some present states of affairs may be expressed (in English, at least) only by reference to prior events which define them". However,

<sup>54</sup> D.A.Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville, TN<sup>3</sup>2009) 75.

<sup>55</sup> D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI 1996) 574, emphasis his.

<sup>56</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 205, n.74.



this is getting quite close to a more traditional interpretation, in which the perfect holds together both the completed action in the past, as well as the resulting state. Why would this be a problem? It seems to be the case that it is not here the data which pushes us away from such an interpretation, but the theory that they have already assumed as their starting point. We might even grant that the perfect normally focuses on the present state that results from the completed action. Yet it is not clear that this would necessitate doing so without reference to “prior events which define them”. The comments by Ciampa and Rosner seem to provide evidence that we may want to reconsider doing away with the “both-and” in the traditional view of the perfect tense.

Another example is found in their discussion of 9,1: “The third verb (‘I have seen’) is a perfect indicative (ἐώρακα), which also stresses Paul’s present state and status as an eyewitness of the Lord. The verbs all work together to provide description and characterization of Paul as background for the following discussion”<sup>57</sup>. While an argument can be made that Paul is stressing his present status as an eyewitness, is it likely that this is totally disconnected from a past vision of the exalted Christ? Since Paul has the option of saying εἰμὶ μαρτυρεῖς (“I am a witness”) in a way that would have been grammatically parallel to the two previous clauses, the question is why he would have used the perfect verb here? One possible explanation that immediately commends itself is that Paul here uses the perfect tense to root his present authority in the past event of the Damascus road calling<sup>58</sup>.

In conclusion, Ciampa and Rosner’s discussion on the perfect tense reflects their stated position regarding the perfect tense: whatever else is going on with the perfect tense, it likely indicates a present state<sup>59</sup>. Inasmuch as they give numerous

<sup>57</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 397, n.5.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. S. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI 1993) 285. Also, see Ciampa and Rosner’s comments on 9,18: “Committed to me reflects the perfect indicative πεπίστευμαι, and points to Paul’s present status as one entrusted with a commission or task” (p. 418, n.106.). This again reflects their stated position on the perfect verb. However, here again the completed action seems to be at least implied as well. This is another example of a verb of which the present state is hard to imagine apart from the past action. While the stress may be on the present state, it need not be completely without reference to the past action. (Note that their comments on 9,1 and 9,18 don’t actually deny that there is a past completed action. I am inferring this from their stated position in the introduction, as well as their other comments. My point here is to push back on what is left out if present states are viewed without any reference to the “prior events which define them”.)

<sup>59</sup> An interesting use of the perfect that they do not stress in the introduction is the use of the perfect tense for discourse prominence. For example, their comments on 9,22 state, “The stress found in the previous lines on the goal of winning others for Christ is heightened here. Paul switches from the aorist tense used in vv. 20, 22a (translated I became) to the perfect tense here (translated I have become) to sum up his practice throughout his ministry” (p. 430). This is explained in a footnote: “Stanley Porter has suggested that the perfect is a ‘foreground’ tense-form which is ‘used to mark prominent features’ . . . Such features are ‘selected for grammatical as well as conceptual



examples of perfect verbs that seem to be focusing on present states of affairs, they give helpful interpretations of the passages. However, there are a few passages that still seems to be better explained by the use of a traditional explanation in which the perfect combines the completed action and resultant state, even if it can be shown that they frequently focus on the resultant state.

### 3. SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE COMMENTARY

In light of the preceding material, the following are the results of an examination of Ciampa and Rosner's use of VAT in their commentary on 1 Corinthians:

1. *Aktionsart is attributable to a complex of features.* The first claim that they made in the Introduction was that VAT improves exegesis by attributing *Aktionsart* (kind of time) to numerous factors, such as the combination of tense, lexeme, and context. The best of their comments in the commentary are consistent with this position and in fact do add nuance to the discussion, as well as giving the reader a better understanding of how the various elements of the Greek language come together to convey meaning. At other times, their comments are consistent with their theory, but they don't actually show how these various factors contribute to a particular verb's *Aktionsart*. In a few cases, there is no discernable difference between

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emphasis' . . . Similarly, Constantine Campbell believes that the perfect tense usually has the pragmatic implicature of intensification or prominence: "The concept of prominence is here taken to refer to the degree to which an element stands out from others in its environment. Thus, prominence is here roughly synonymous with stress" (p. 430, n.163). Thus they refer to Porter and Campbell to highlight the use of the perfect for prominence. Here they indicate that the perfect tense is not so much indicating present state as "summing up" Paul's practice. For other examples of comments on the use of the perfect tense for discourse prominence, see also p. 415, n.90 and p. 748, n.51. Other discussions in the commentary on the use of tense for discourse prominence include comments on 8,12-13 (p. 394, n.107, commenting on the aorist subjunctive plus οὐ μὴ for prominence), 11,23-24 (p. 548, n.165, commenting on the use of imperfects for "offline" material and aorists for "mainline" material).

Another interesting exception to their general interpretation of the perfect as indicating present state is found in their comments on 7,17-24, where they discuss the use of the verb καλέω (note the uses of both the aorist and perfect tenses): "The perfect indicative used here and in v. 17 (κέκληκεν) may be best understood as the equivalent to an aorist verb, either due to the occasional use of a perfect tense in place of an aorist (see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek*, 110-12) or because it is a historical perfect used with a lexeme related to discourse (the indirect discourse implied by 'as the Lord called him'; see Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 107-8)" (p. 309, n.186). This comment again highlights the importance of lexeme for meaning. Here they explain that this is an exception to the "perfect as stative" position either because of lexeme or simply because the aorist and perfects sometimes were used in place of one another.



their discussion and a more traditional approach, or their comments appear to be inconsistent with their stated position<sup>60</sup>.

2. *Default temporal understanding of verb tense.* According to their stated position in the introduction, they view tense as having a default temporal significance unless it is cancelled out. However, most of their comments highlight occasions when the temporal significance of a given use of a tense is something other than the default. In these cases, they highlight the contextual factors that constrain the interpretation in this direction.

3. *Aorist imperatives indicate specific instruction, and present imperatives indicate general instruction.* With regard to the imperative, the categories of general instruction (for the present tense) and specific instruction (for the aorist tense) seem to be applied in an almost cut-and-paste manner. Most of the comments on the imperative just restate the position from the introduction and apply it to the context. In fact, this application of VAT seems to flatten out the meaning of the particular passages and seems to take into account the various contextual factors only to explain exceptional uses of the imperative. I suggested above that it might be profitable to explore how these various contextual factors might constrain our interpretation of the *unexceptional* cases as well. In addition, on the basis of the Ciampa and Rosner's own exposition of the text, the discussion above demonstrated the need to broaden the interpretive options beyond the binary general versus specific instruction. On the basis of their own exposition of the text, there seems to be good reason to include something like an "iterative command" as an option alongside the other two, and perhaps a further examination would reveal further options.

4. *Perfect tense indicates present state.* The standard comment by the authors regarding the perfect tense explains it as indicating "stative" action. The "traditional" model said that the perfect indicated a completed action with continuing effects, and that it could emphasize either component (the completed action or the continuing effects). As with the imperative, Ciampa and Rosner's approach seems to have the potential to be applied in a cut-and-paste way that overlooks the complexity of the text and instead applies the same meaning to the verb tense in every case. It seems that Ciampa and Rosner claim that every occurrence of the perfect verb refers (exclusively?) to the present state without consideration of the action that caused the state. I noted a few cases that might actually be better explained by the older approach, which may indicate that even if the *focus* of the perfect tense is usually on the resulting state, it need not necessitate that it *never* refers to the action that brought about the state.

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<sup>60</sup> Of course it must be taken into account that the commentary is not a commentary on the *verbal aspect* of 1 Corinthians, and so they are not always focusing on it; nevertheless, consistency is important.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

There is much to appreciate about how Ciampa and Rosner have demonstrated the usefulness of VAT for the actual exegesis of the text of 1 Corinthians. They have incorporated the insights of VAT's approach to *Aktionsart* fairly consistently, with the benefit that the reader now has a more nuanced explanation of the way that the various factors in the text combine to convey the kind of action that the author wants to communicate. The authors have furthermore approached the text with the understanding that the verb tense does in fact have a temporal reference, though it is neither the essence of the tense, nor is it uncancellable, which provides satisfying interpretations of the temporal reference of verbs within a framework that explains the exceptions as well.

On the other hand, the authors are not totally consistent in applying their view of *Aktionsart*, which results, on occasion, in somewhat confusing or apparently contradictory statements. This highlights the need for consistency and clarity of expression regardless of the theory that one follows.

Also, with regard to the imperatives and the perfect tense, the theory seems to have prejudiced the authors' interpretation of the text at times. While their interpretations of the imperatives and perfects often (or even usually) make good sense of the passages, there are exceptions that are troubling. This seems to indicate that VAT, while providing a number of helpful insights, continues to have some weaknesses that show up when it is applied to actual texts. These weaknesses are revealed when the use of VAT in the interpretation of these texts causes the interpreter to use more or less cut-and-paste categories that oversimplify the data of the text.

The attempt to apply the insights of VAT will no doubt continue. Ciampa and Rosner have written an excellent commentary overall, and this author hopes that if it is revised in the future, these brief comments might be a help in the improvement of their work. With regard to the bigger picture, it is hoped that scholars across the discipline will continue to move forward in the application of the knowledge of the Greek verbal system in exegesis by continuing to utilize the added insights of VAT while growing in consistency and clarity, as well as fine-tuning it to avoid any shortcomings that the theory may have.

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