

AN EXAMINATION OF THE
ASPECT OF THE AORIST
TENSE WITH APPLICATION
TO 'PARASTESAI' IN
ROMANS 12:1

A Paper Presented to
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203

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*Crossfield: aor.
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Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ,
ΠΑΡΑΣΤῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἀγίαν
εὐαρεστον τῷ Θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν.

ROMANS 12:1
UBS³

Introduction: If the Apostle Paul were to hear what is too common a saying today, "doctrine is not practical," he would surely cringe in his boots, so to speak. Having dealt extensively in Romans 1-3 with the state of sin in the world, and next laying out in chapters 4-8 God's sovereign plan of remedy for sin, redemption through His Son Jesus Christ, and next showing that His redemptive plan still involves Israel (chapters 9-11), Paul is now in the final four chapters going to show how doctrine DOES make for effective practice. On the basis of God's revealed plan of redemption among men, Paul exhorts his hearers to action. It is that action with which we are concerned in this paper. Through the mercies extended him by God, Paul exhorts the Romans to παραστῆσαι their bodies holy and living sacrifices to God. The above word, rendered almost invariably as "present", is in the aorist infinitive form, and bespeaks a one-time "sacrifice", an ongoing process or attitude of consecration, or some combination thereof. What is the proper aspect intended by Paul in using παραστῆσαι? How is the Christian to present himself to God?

The Development Of A Lifestyle: A search for some sort of "commentary tradition" on this matter is not insignificant! Of the more than 300 commentaries on Romans in the DTS library, of which this writer sampled 37, very few even note the Greek construction itself, and those which do hardly have a sentence as to its intended aspect. McBeth, Steele/Thomas and Vine re-

present those who state emphatically that the word "present" in the aorist so used means a distinct once-and-for-all action (for a complete list of commentaries surveyed, see last page). None of them attempts to support this conclusion. Ryrie however, in further developing and clarifying this inclination, states :

"an initial, decisive and crisis presentation...is represented in the Greek by the aorist infinitive used here and reinforced by the aorist imperative in Romans 6:13b. Now the aorist represents an action as a point or an event even though it may cover a short or a long period of time. But it does not represent the action as a series of repeated acts as does the present tense for instance. Therefore the presentation of body is a single, irrevocable act of surrender, rather than a series of repeated acts of dedication." (p.79, Balancing...)

These comments trace well the reasoning in this understanding of $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$. In addition to Ryrie, Lange and Lenski point out that the presentation is to be a complete one--no altared sacrifice which would be acceptable to God can be partially withheld. The remaining comment of note among the commentators has to do with the presentation of the body AS A SACRIFICE. It is the body, the very seat of personal existence, which is living, which must be turned over to God, humbly, in complete resignation in view of His precious mercies. This is not a chance image, Paul having just spoken of that chosen nation given the oracles, the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the Law, the worship and the promises (Rom. 3:2; 9:3,4). And this sacrificial image is the object of our word under consideration.

It is conceded that the event of Christian presentation must be decisive, and one of complete commitment as to the Christian's attitude about his body (Boice's comments here

are most helpful). With all of the revelation of Romans 1-11 freshly before us as Roman readers, there can be no interpretive room for half-hearted, half-committed sacrificers. But what of the "state-of-the-art" considerations of Frank Stagg as to the so called "abused aorist?" He understands the aorist to allow for "any kind of action" not "necessarily a single one." Stagg further substantiates the idea by referring both to A.T. Robertson and Blass-Debrunner and their comments as to the particularly broadbased nature of the aorist. So, apparently it can possibly indicate action of an ongoing or progressive nature, though most probably also decisive and determined (to say that $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ is primarily progressive--a presentation which one grows into, or gradually decides on, from this text, that is, would be to strip the text of its exhortative power). What therefore is the unravelling? What does Paul want to see in the lives of his readers?

There is another option wh. you don't mention - iterative action (i.e. repetitive)

Perhaps most helpful is the simple comparison of New Testament occurrences of the exact aorist infinitive in question. There are some 8 places where $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ is found--two are Lukan and six are Pauline. What is significant is that probably all cases speak to a distinct event (Jesus presented at the Temple, Paul to Felix, the Bride to Christ). But the intent of the presentation is the consummation or conclusion of a process! It is not just the fact that Jesus shows up at the temple. It is not just that Paul ends up before Felix. And

it is most assuredly not just the event of the Church being at some future POINT presented to Christ. But rather, that these events occur within the contexts of their respective processes! Jesus is presented at the temple as the commencement of a life of fulfilling prophecy and the Law. Paul stands before Felix in the providential plan of God within the process of going to Rome. And again, most gloriously, the Church will be presented to Christ not as some mere POINT in the future, arbitrarily determined, but as the consummation of the process of the Spirit having progressively sanctified her. The above usages of our word, "present" (Luke 2:22; Acts 23:24; Rom.6:13, 19; 2 Cor.11:2; Eph.5:27; Col.1:22,28), make this expanded understanding of the aorist quite imperative. Perhaps it is regrettable that the outstanding commentators by and large have neglected to mark out the significance of $\pi\alpha\rho\lambda\sigma\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ here in Rom. 12:1. And when Ryrie (who has written the most on the matter) makes his point that this aorist is once-for-all (though he is speaking against the notion of continued acts of rededication), we can take his emphasis to heart. But surely this strophe in 12:1 aptly introduces that precious last 25% of the Letter to the Romans! Their lives are to stand in contrast to the world around them by their lifeSTYLES. A decisive presentation of the body (not only the mind) will bring about a Christian attitude of progressive discipline. It will result in effective "Body-Life", testimonial subjection to secular authority and a general victory as to self-centeredness.

Careful that you don't mix lexical factors (relating strictly to the meaning of the verb) with grammatical/linguistic factors (relating to the signif. of the aorist tense).

John Calvin put it well: "It is then the beginning of a right course in good works, when we understand that we are consecrated to the Lord; for hence it follows, that we must cease to live to ourselves, in order that we may devote all the actions of our life to His service." The aorist infinitive calls us on to an ongoing attitude of decision. It is consistent with New Testament theology on sanctification to call us to a place of determined consecration in our daily lifestyles from which to deal with the sin principle, a principle not finally eradicated from us until the wonderful Day when we shall see Christ.

Though I could find it nowhere specifically, my impression is that you see a sort of consummative idea here - the end of the process, so to speak. But as mentioned earlier, this could lie in the lexical meaning of the verb, not with the tense.

Overall, your paper is a good effort. I appreciate your attempt to be practical -

prof

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