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Imperative present tense verbs (commands) in the New Testament

The New Testament contains many commands that have soteriological significance. (In other words, they relate directly to the salvation that will take place when Jesus comes back to judge the world.) Probably due to ignorance of basic Greek grammar rules, many Christians and pastors falsely assume that most of these commands relate mainly to or strictly to conversion rather than the salvation that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world. There is an abundance of explicit scriptures that speak to this which can be understood by any English-speaking person with no understanding of New Testament Greek.

This article was written to demonstrate that, in addition to the overwhelming evidence accessible to English-speaking people, when Greek grammar rules are applied, we see that the New Testament writers mainly thought of salvation as something that will take place in the future when Jesus comes back to judge the world. Their commands were given to prepare their hearers so that they will be ready for that event.

Most of these commands relating to salvation are present tense imperative verbs. Here are a few examples that are familiar to most Christians:

- "Repent and believe in the gospel" (See Mark 1:15, spoken by Jesus.)
- "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden" (See Matthew 11:28, spoken by Jesus.)
- "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." (See John 7:37, spoken by Jesus.)
- "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (See Luke 13:24.)
- "Come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (See Mark 10:21, spoken by Jesus.)

All of these examples are present tense commands. The New Testament writers had other options open to them but they chose present tense commands. Koine Greek present tense commands are NOT commands to do something once! They are always commanding something that is to be done continually or repeatedly without **stopping**.¹ You can affirm this by consulting any decent Greek grammar book under imperative verbs and volitional clauses. One example is **Wallace, Greek Grammar, Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament, 1996 p. 721-722, Zondervan**. Also, on page 485, "With the present, the force is generally to command the action as an ongoing process. This is in keeping with the present's aspect.")

Therefore, in the case of the present tense commands mentioned above, they can accurately be interpreted as follows.

- Repent and keep repenting, and believe and continue to believe in the gospel.
- Come and continue to come to me.
- If anyone thirsts, he must come and continue to come to Me and drink.
- Strive and never stop striving to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."
- Come follow Me and continue to follow Me."

What would you say to an unbeliever who asks you, "What must I do to be saved?" Because the answer you give involves the ultimate salvation of his soul, the answer you give him is very important.

If you read this article, you now have a responsibility to do something about it. Don't ignore [the abundant N.T. Scriptures that insist on continuance](#). Also, I have made reference here to Greek grammar resources that back up the things stated in this article. It is not wise to ignore these things. We must be careful how we answer someone who asks, "What must I do to be saved."

If you want to see my detailed response to the question, "What must I do to be saved?," [click this link](#). It will take you to an **excerpt** from my recently released book, *The Narrow Way Gospel Study Guide*.

¹ One of the most recognized Greek expert on this subject is K. L. McKay: You can read his writings on this subject in his article, *Aspect in Imperativial Constructions in New Testament Greek*, KcKay, K. L., *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 27, Fasc. 3 (July 1985), pp 201-226, published by Brill.