

## Oida and Ginōskō and Verbal Aspect in Pauline Usage\*

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For a century or so students of the Greek New Testament have been discussing off and on whether the supposed classical distinction between the meanings of two Greek verbs for “to know” is preserved in their NT usage. It has been contended that in classical usage the verb *eidenai* (or *oida*) signified knowledge grasped directly or intuitively, completely and finally; whereas the verb *ginōskein* referred to knowledge gained by a learning experience of some sort and considered capable of development. Earlier opinion tended to see this distinction maintained in the NT; but somewhere in the first third of this century the weight of authority shifted toward the view that in the NT a great deal of synonymy is evident between these two terms.<sup>1</sup> There has never been universal agreement, however.

For the most part the criteria used in differentiating or in equating the NT meanings of these two words can be summed up by the consideration: “Does this passage more naturally

\* Most of what follows is based on material in my Ph. D. dissertation, “Biblical Semantics, Semantic Structure, and Biblical Lexicology: A Study of Methods, with Special Reference to the Pauline Lexical Field of ‘Cognition’” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980; University Microfilms #80—20940), esp. pp. 80-90, 294—302. It represents a slightly expanded version of a paper read at the Twenty-Fourth Conference of the Linguistic Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota at Grand Forks, ND, October 30, 1981.

support the classical meaning of the verb used or does it more naturally indicate that the verbs were used interchangeably?”<sup>2</sup> Obviously, this leaves a great deal to the student's own intuition, and the fact is that the same evidence has been interpreted in opposite ways by competent persons using essentially similar methods.

More recent studies of this problem such as that by I. de la Potterie on the Gospel of John (1959) and that by D. W. Burdick on St. Paul's letters (1974),<sup>3</sup> go a long way toward strengthening their conclusions by first analyzing and categorizing the syntactic patterns in which these verbs occur. But de la Potterie appears already to have made up his mind before considering the evidence. Thus he concludes that John's Gospel uses *eidenai* and *ginōskein* entirely in line with their supposed c...

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