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**THIRD (AND FOURTH)**

**CLASS CONDITIONS**

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*Third class conditional sentences, a very frequent type of*

*conditional sentence, are identified and characterized by their use of*

*the subjunctive mood in the protasis. The subjunctive indicates*

*potentiality, contingency, or simple futurity. It is the condition which*

*points to a future eventuality. The common notion that it indicates a*

*degree of probability is examined by inductive study of all the NT*

*examples and is concluded to be totally incorrect. Also, the often-*

*made distinction between present general and future particular condi-*

*tions within this third class is shown to be neither helpful nor*

*indicated by NT Greek texts. All third class conditions are essentially*

*future contingencies.*

\* \* \*

THE third classification of conditional sentences in the Greek NT

occurs almost as frequently as the first and five times more

frequently than the second.1 It is designated by many names, reflecting

different understandings on the part of grammarians of its basic

significance.

FORM IDENTIFICATION

This group of conditional clauses is identified by the use of ἐάν

and the subjunctive mood in the protasis. The ἐάν of course is the

ordinary conditional particle εἰ, found in all the other types of

conditions, combined by crasis and contraction with the modal

particle ἄν.2 Primarily it is the use of the subjunctive mood which

l There are about 305 first-class, 47 second-class, and 277 third-class conditions in

the NT. For a treatment of the first and second-classes see my preceding articles,

"First-Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" *GTJ* 2 (1981) 74-114, and "Second-

Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 81-88.

2 Historical grammarians point out that in late Greek the distinction between

and e]a<n seems to be fading. See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New*

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identifies the type. All other conditions use the indicative mood3 in

the protasis.

The apodosis appears in a wide variety of forms. About 150 are

simple statements of fact, 32 are questions, 32 are promises or threats,

27 are admonitory, 16 are warnings, 12 are commands, 11 are

instructions.

There is no pattern of tenses used, either in the protasis or in the

apodosis. In the NT examples there are 110 present, 205 aorist, and 3

perfect subjunctive4 verbs in the protases. In the apodoses there are

116 present, 119 future, 7 aorist, and 6 perfect indicatives, 25 aorist

subjunctives, 26 present and 16 aorist imperatives, 1 present optative,

1 present infinitive (of indirect discourse), and 2 present participles

(dependent on an imperative verb). The relationship of this great

variety to the significance of this class of condition will be examined

later.

In the discussion of this many-faceted grammatical construction

two major questions need consideration; first, the significance of the

*Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1017. N.

Turner says, "It is a feature of Hell. Greek that the connection between the mood and

the conjunction (e.g., subj. after ἄν) is becoming less determined, and so we have εἰ

with subj., ἐάν with ind., ὅτε with subj., ὅταν with indic., etc. In M Gr only the fuller

conjunctions ἐάν and ὅταν remain, and they have both indic. (real) and subj. (probable)"

(Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. 3: Syntax* [Edinburgh: T. &

T. Clark, 1963] 107 n. 2).

The NT text shows a very few variations from the usual pattern of εἰ with the

indicative and ἐάν with the subjunctive, and almost always they are textually suspect.

The UBS text has 3 examples of εἰ with the subjunctive: Phil 3:12, Rev 11:5 (here it is a

verbatim repetition of a normal εἰ + indicative example in the preceeding verse, and

apparently with precisely the same meaning), and I Cor 14:5 (where ἐκτὸς εἰ μή is a

fixed formula). There are two examples of ἐάν with a present indicative: I Thess 3:8

and I John 5:15 (οἶδα is semantically present). These probably reflect the later

confusion which used ἐάν for εἰ and thus should be classified as first-class. There are

two examples of ἐάν with a future indicative (Luke 19:40; Acts 8:3l) which may also be

first class. However, the situation may be different in the case of a future indicative,

since these forms in other constructions sometimes seem to function as aorist sub-

junctives (e.g., 23 instances of ἵνα followed by a future indicative, with no difference in

meaning). A. T. Robertson points out, "it is quite probable that the future indicative is

just a variation of the aorist subjunctive" (Robertson, *Grammar*, 924-25). Hence, ἐάν

with a future indicative may be a normal third-class condition.

3 The classical fourth-class condition which used the optative mood does not occur

in the NT or the Greek of that period except in archaic expressions or fragments of

sentences. This type shared with the third class the use of a non-indicative mood. Its

relation to the third class and the actual NT remnants will be treated later in this article

(see n. 41).

4 In John 3:27; 6:65; James 5:15. Also, there are three examples (1 John 5:15; I Cor

13:2; 14:11) of the perfect subjunctive of οἶδα, but although οἶδα is perfect in form it is

in sense present, and I have counted these three among the presents.

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subjunctive mood used in the protasis and its bearing on the semantic

significance of the type of conditional sentence, and second, the

validity of the oft-claimed distinction between the present-general

and the future-particular sub-classifications of these ἐάν + subjunctive

conditions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBJUNCTIVE

Since the use of the subjunctive distinguishes this class from the

others, it seems obvious that the basic significance must be seen in the

meaning of the subjunctive mood. Here we face a confusing divergence

of expression on the part of grammarians. As A. T. Robertson says,

". . . mode is far and away the most difficult theme in Greek syntax.”5

Later he says specifically of the subjunctive mood, "So the gram-

marians lead us a merry dance with the Subjunctive.”6 In spite of the

difficulty and confusion, however, there is wide-spread agreement7 on

its basic meaning.

*Mood of Uncertainty. Potentiality, Futurity*

A. T. Robertson, in his *Short Grammar*, calls both the subjunctive

and optative moods "the modes for doubtful affirmation.”8 Later, in

his major work, he more explicitly summarizes the use of the sub-

junctive under three headings: (a) futuristic, (b) volitive, and (c)

deliberative.9 Admitting that some do not see these as distinct, yet,

"for practical purposes," he uses them. When he deals specifically

with conditional sentences he uses the term *undetermined* to designate

those which use the subjunctive or optative moods, in contrast with

those he calls *determined*, which use the indicative. He explains

*undetermined* by saying, "Naturally the indicative is not allowed here.

The element of uncertainty calls for the subj. or the optative. . . . They

are the moods of doubtful, hesitating affirmation. . . . In this type the

premise is not assumed to be either true or untrue. The point is in the

air and the cloud gathers round it."10 He calls the subjunctive "the

mode of expectation,"11 and says of its time reference, "the third class

5 Robertson, *Grammar*, 912.

6 Ibid., 927.

7 In the following discussion I have chosen to use the words of one well-known and

influential scholar, A. T. Robertson, rather than to record the many similar statements

of other grammarians. Where there is not this essential agreement I shall seek to

compare and evaluate, as, for example, in the section "Degree of Probability."

8 A. T. Robertson, *A Short Grammar* *of the Greek New Testament* (New York:

Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929) 129-31.

9 Robertson, *Grammar*, 928-34.

10 Ibid., 1004-5.

11 Ibid., 1016.

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condition is confined to the future (from the standpoint of the

speaker or writer).”12 He frequently calls attention to this element of

futurity: "The subj. is always future, in subordinate clauses relatively

future.”13

Seeking to summarize, it seems to me that the use of the

subjunctive points essentially to the condition expressed by the protasis

as being doubtful, uncertain, undetermined (because it has not yet

been determined). The term potential is accurate. It is "not yet." It

may be, if. . . . Perhaps the term contingent would be even clearer. It

depends on any number of factors.14 In any case, the common

denominator is futurity. As Goodwin says, the "only fundamental

idea always present in the subjunctive is that of futurity",15 and he

traces it back to the idiom of Homer. Perhaps the best name for this

type of condition is simply the Future Condition.16

*Basis of Potentiality*

One major item for investigation in this inductive study of all the

third class conditions in the NT has been the question of the basis of

the potentiality. Why does the writer use the mood of contingency?

What is the element of uncertainty involved? On what factors or

circumstances does the fulfillment of the condition depend? In the

study of each example in context, first a "basis of potentiality" was

assigned. Afterward, this list was classified under appropriate group-

ings. The results are seen in this tabulation, with the number so

designated, and some examples.

Personal will, choice, judgment 5317

Spiritual condition 2318

Personal actions 10919

Actions of others 3620

Ability, opportunity 421

Providence or Futurity 6122

12 Ibid., 1018.

13 Ibid., 924.

14 See my next section, "Basis of Potentiality."

15 W. W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (New

York: St. Martin's, 1965) 371; cf. also 372-74, 2-4.

16 J. G. Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York: MacMillan,

1950) 132.

17 Examples: Matt 21:25, 26; Luke 5:12; 1 John 2:29.

18 Examples: John 3:3, 5; 8:31; Matt 10:13.

19 Examples: Mark 3:27; John 13:17; 14:14; Rom 10:9.

20 Examples: Matt 5:23; Luke 17:3, 4.

21 Example: Matt 9:21.

22 Examples: Matt 18:12; Rom 7:3; I Cor 4:19; 14:28; 16:10; I John 2:28; 3:2.

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The purpose in listing these is not to provide a system of

classification, but to illustrate and enforce the point that these third

class conditions are indeed doubtful, contingent, undetermined,

belonging to the future. *All* of the instances manifest this quality. I

believe an examination of the examples will confirm this claim.

*Degree of Probability*

The matter next to be considered brings us to a major problem

in the way most grammarians have dealt with the third class con-

ditions: Does the use of the subjunctive imply anything as to the

degree of uncertainty involved? This clearly is claimed by many

grammarians. Robertson calls this "Undetermined, but with prospect

of determination" in contrast with the fourth class, "Undetermined,

with remote prospect of determination," and says further, "This

fourth class is undetermined with less likelihood of determination

than is true of the third class with the subj."23 Of the third class he

says, "The subj. mode brings the expectation within the horizon of a

lively hope in spite of the cloud of hovering doubt.”24 Blass considers

it to denote "circumstances actual or likely to happen.”25 Winer

makes it a "condition with assumption of 'objective' possibility where

experience will decide whether it is real or not.”26 Burton says of it, "a

supposition which refers to the future, suggesting some probability to

its fulfillment.”27 Blass-Debrunner describes it as "that which under

certain circumstances is expected," calling it "a case of expectation.”28

Chamberlain says of it, "The condition is stated as a matter of doubt,

with some prospect of fulfillment," then of the fourth class he says,

"even more doubtful than the third class.”29

Most explicit of these is the grammar of Dana and Mantey. In a

very helpful appraisal of the general significance of the subjunctive

mood, they point out that there are only "two essential moods. . . that

which is actual and that which is possible. . . . So the two essential

23 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1016, 1020.

24 Ibid., 1016.

25 F. Blass, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Tr. by Henry St. John Thackeray.

(London, MacMillan, 1911) 213, 214.

26 G. B. Winer, *A Grammar of the Idioms of the Greek Language of the New*

*Testament* (Andover: Draper, 1897) 291.

27 E. D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*

(Chicago: University of Chicago, 1897) 104.

28 F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other*

*Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of

Chicago, 1961) 188.

29 W. D. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1941) 198-99.

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moods in language are the *real*--represented in Greek by the

indicative; and the potential--embracing the subjunctive, optative

and imperative.”30 Then, however, they proceed to characterize these

potential moods as representing a continuum of degree of potentiality,

from objectively possible (subjunctive) to subjectively possible (op-

tative) to volitionally possible (imperative), or from probability (sub-

junctive) to possibility (optative) to intention (imperative), or from

mild contingency (subjunctive) to strong contingency (optative). Thus,

the third-class condition becomes the "More Probable Future Condi-

tion" in contrast with the fourth which they call the "Less Probable

Future Condition.”31

Are these measurements of potentiality or degrees of probability

valid? Can we say of a third-class condition, "There is doubt, of

course, but it probably will be realized"? One of the primary purposes

of this study was to investigate this question. It is the judgment of the

present writer that this scheme, while it may be theoretically logical,

is completely unsupported and in fact totally discredited by actual

usage in the NT.

In conducting the study, an attempt was made to assign to each

of these examples a "measure word" indicating from the context the

degree of probability or improbability involved in the realization of

the condition. Out of this grew a list of words, arranged here

somewhat in a "logical" order, with the number of instances and a

few representative examples.

Fulfillment certain 1932

Fulfillment probable 6333

Fulfillment doubtful 2034

Fulfillment improbable 1635

Fulfillment possible 436

Fulfillment conceivable3037

30 H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*

(New York: MacMillan, 1948) 165-67.

31 Ibid., 290.

32 In addition to the illustrations given in the discussion following, see: Mark 4:22;

10:30; John 5:31; 8:14,16; Rom 2:25; 1 Cor 6:4; 10:8; CoI4:10; I John 2:29.33 Examples: Matt 5:46; 21:3; 24:23; Mark 12:19; Luke 17:3 (contrast v. 4); John

8:36; 9:31; 12:24; 14:23; 1 Cor 8:10; CoI3:13; 1 John2:1; 5:14.

34 Examples: Matt 21:24; Mark 8:3; Luke 17:4 (cf. v 3); 22:67.

35 Examples: Luke 16:31; John 7:51; 11:48; Acts 26:5; I Cor 13:1-3; 14:7, 8.

36 Examples: Matt 24:48-51; 28:14; 1 Cor 14:28; 2 Cor 9:4.

37 Examples: Matt 21:21, 25, 26; Mark 3:24, 25; 14:31; Luke 16:30; John 21:22;

Rom 2:26; I Cor4:15; 12:15; Gal 1:18.

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Certain *not* to be fulfilled 738

No indication of probability 12039

Several observations result from this study.

First, the first category above represents third class conditions

which are used of future events which are absolutely certain of

fulfillment, such as the lifting up of Christ on the cross (John 12:32),

his return to heaven (John 14:3; 16:7), his second coming (1 John

2:28; 3:2), the multiplication of Israel as the sand of the sea (Rom

9: 27), Paul's preaching the gospel (1 Cor 9:16), the perishing of our

earthly house (2 Cor 5:1). The potentiality of such things is simple

futurity; it has not happened yet. To use the word "probable" with

such would be completely misleading. We could never understand

Christ to say, "I probably will come again," and the third-class

condition used does not in fact mean that.

Second, the seventh category above represents third-class condi-

tions which are certain *not* to be fulfilled. Some are set in pairs as

opposites to others in the "certain" category (John 16:7; 1 Cor 9:16).

They include such totally impossible items as Christ not seeing what

the Father does (John 5:19) or his saying he does not know the

Father (John 8:55), or the apostasy not coming first (2 Thess 2:3), or

man's keeping the law (Rom 2:25), or the sailors not remaining in the

ship with resulting loss of life (Acts 27:31) after Paul has already

assured them that God had promised all would be safe. Again, the

element of contingency here is simple futurity, and the remarks in the

preceeding paragraph are applicable here.

Third, the vast bulk of examples in the middle of the spectrum

obviously fit the characterization of third-class conditions as doubtful,

contingent, or potential, but they do not support the concept that

degree of potentiality is involved. They range from probable to

doubtful to improbable. They include what possibly might occur and

what the mind can conceive as possible. It should be noted that all

these "degree of probability" terms are derived from the context; they

all are simple ἐάν + subjunctive conditions.

Fourth, the very large number of instances labeled as "No

indication" (120 out of 277, or 42%) underscore the same conclusion.

They are passages where even the context cannot tell the degree of

probability. Often, opposite contingencies are listed, each using the

38 All of the examples so classified have been listed in the discussion following.

39 In addition to the examples given in the discussion, see: Matt 4:9; 18: 13; 22:24;

Luke 13:3, 5; John 6:44, 51; 7:17; 15:7; Rom 7:2-3; 13:4; I Cor 4:19; Heb 3:7; James

5:15; Rev 2:5.

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same conditional form; you may forgive, or not forgive (Matt 6:14,

15), your eye may be single or evil (Matt 6:22, 23), the house you

enter may be worthy or not worthy (Matt 10:13), your brother may

hear you when you rebuke him, or he may not, or he may refuse to

hear when you take another along, or he may refuse to hear the

church (Matt 18:15-17), a man may walk in the day or in the night

(John 11:9, 10), we may live or die, in either case we do so "unto the

Lord" (Rom 14:8). More frequently they are single contingencies; a

man may or may not “want to do His will” (John 7:17), it may be the

Lord's will or it may not (I Cor 4:19; James 4:15; Heb 6:3), a virgin

may marry or not (I Cor 7:28), a man or a woman may have long

hair or not (I Cor 11:14, 5), the Thessalonians may, or may not,

stand fast in the Lord (I Thess 3:8). Clearly, degree of probability or

potentiality is not in the third-class construction. If it is present at all

it is in the context.

*Comparison with Fourth-Class Conditions*

Such terms expressing comparison have their origin in the clas-

sical grammarians and refer to a comparison between two classes of

future condition, those using ἐάν + subjunctive and those using εἰ +

optative. W. W. Goodwin distinguished these as "Future More Vivid"

and "Future Less Vivid.”40 By vividness he did not mean more or less

probable, but a greater or lesser distinctness and definiteness of

concept. B. L. Gildersleeve, followed by Robertson and a host of NT

grammarians, made mode rather than time the decisive factor in

classification of conditional sentence and gave us the familiar "four

class" terminology. Within this group, apparently, the more probable-

less probable concept has grown.

It is usually not clearly recognized that this comparison, whatever

its nature, referred to classical grammar, not to NT grammar. With

no attempt to evaluate the propriety of this analysis for classical

Greek, it should be noted that such can have no application to NT

Greek, for the obvious reason that the NT has no fourth-class

conditions.41 As Robertson himself says, "It is an ornament of the

40 W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, rev. by C. B. Gulick (Boston: Ginn, 1930)

298.

41 The correctness of this statement needs to be supported. There are 10 instances

where εἰ appears with an optative verb, thus possibly a fourth class protasis. Of these,

one is not conditional at all: εἰ is introducing an indirect question, "whether" (Acts

25:20; perhaps also 17:27). Five appear to be stereotyped, almost parenthetical expres-

sions, the kind which might survive after the construction has become archaic (εἰ

τύχοι I Cor 14:10; 15:37; εἰ δύναιτον, Acts 27:12, 39; εἰ δύνατον εἵυ, Acts 20:16). The

three remaining seem clearly to be fourth-class protases; one with an apodosis which is

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cultured class and was little used by the masses save in a few set

phrases. It is not strange, therefore, that no complete example of this

fourth-class condition appears in the LXX, the NT or the papyri so

far as examined. . . . No example of the opt. in both condition and

conclusion in the current κοινή. In the modern Greek it has

disappeared completely.”42 Now, if all future conditions in the NT are

third class, that is, all are more probable, there is no longer any

meaning to "more." "More probable" must be understood to mean

"more probable than if he had used the optative," not "more likely

than not." It seems much better to follow the suggestion of Duncan

Gibbs, "that the ἐάν with the subjunctive has become merely a

formula for presenting a future condition. Any suggestion of expecta-

tion of fulfillment which might have existed at one time (if ever it did)

has now vanished. The condition is simply a large basket made to

hold any future condition, likely or unlikely, possible or absurd.”43

*Comparison with εἰ + Future Indicative*

When we call this third class the Future Condition we do not

mean that all conditions future in time belong to this class. In my

previous study I discovered 14 examples of εἰ + future indicative in

the protasis. These first-class conditions of course are also future in

time reference. How do they relate to the third-class future conditions?

The discussions of the grammarians reflect their own understanding

of the basic significance of the two classes. Goodwin says, "The future

indicative with εἰ is very often used in future conditions implying

strong likelihood of fulfillment, especially in appeals to the feelings

and in threats and warnings.”44 Smyth calls it the "Emotional Future

Condition. . . . When the condition expresses a strong feeling, the

future indicative with εἰ is generally used instead of ἐάν with the

subjunctive. Such. . . commonly contain a warning or a threat or in

general something undesirable.”45 Zerwick, who characterizes the first

class as "the concrete case," says "εἰ with future (instead of ἐάν with

in indirect discourse (Acts 24:19); the other two (I Pet 3:14, 17) have apodoses in which

the verb is left unexpressed. There is thus no complete example of the fourth-class

condition.

It should be noted that the only optatives which are involved here are those with εἰ

forming a protasis. Optatives occurring in so-called "implied apodoses" (without a

protasis) are simple instances of the potential optative and are not conditional, except

perhaps by implication.

42 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1020-21.

43 Duncan G. Gibbs, "The Third Class Condition in New Testament Usage” (Th.

M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979) 51.

44 Goodwin, *Grammar*, 298.

45 H. W. Smyth, *A Greek Grammar* (New York: American Book Co., 1916) 346.

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the subjunctive) is of course perfectly correct and classical, so long as

the condition is to be represented as a concrete one.”46 Turner says,

"This sometimes conveys the same idea but occurs very seldom in

Ptol. pap. The feeling of definiteness and actual realization accom-

panies it. It is almost causal.”47 But after citing several examples he

admits, "The difficulty about this view is 2 Tim 2:12 where the

condition was surely conceived as no more than hypothetical.”

Robertson surprisingly says, "The kinship in origin and sense of the

aorist subj. and fut. ind. makes the line a rather fine one between εἰ

and the fut. ind. and ἐάν and the subj."48 If we understand the first

class as being simple logical connection, as I have attempted to

demonstrate earlier,49 then εἰ with a future indicative indicates a

simple logical connection in future time. If we accept the understand-

ing of the third-class being presented in this paper, then ἐάν with a

subjunctive calls attention to some element of future contingency

involved. The form used will depend on the purpose of the speaker or

writer.

*Summary*

What term can be used to express the essential meaning of the

third class condition? Such terms as "probable," "likely," "expectancy,"

"anticipatory" are all misleading and not suitable. "Potential" or

"contingent" are neutral terms which express well the meaning if

properly understood. Zerwick, in the English translation, uses the

term "eventual," apparently to refer to that which may eventualize or

come to pass. The English dictionary gives that as a legitimate

meaning for "eventual," but probably it is not normally understood in

that sense by English readers. We come back to the term "Future

Condition," which in my judgment is to be preferred.

GENERAL VERSUS PARTICULAR

It has been broadly recognized that within this ἐάν + subjunctive

class there are two distinct50 types of conditional statements. One

46 M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, trans. by Joseph Smith (Rome: Pontifical Biblical

Institute, 1963) 111.

47 N. Turner, *Syntax*, 115.

48 Robertson, *Grammar*, 1017.

49 In the first article of this series, *GTJ* 2 (1981).

50 One needs to take care not to overestimate this distinctness.

While semantically it is easy to see the distinction, yet in actual usage it often is

not so obvious. The present writer has attempted to classify these third-class conditions

in the NT between present-general and future-particular, on two occasions widely

separated in time. The results were greatly divergent. And when these were compared

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group expresses general or universal suppositions which, whenever

they are fulfilled, bring the stated results. "If a kingdom is divided

against itself it cannot stand" (Mark 3:24); "The law does not

condemn if it does not first hear. . . and know. . . ." (John 7:51); "If

anyone walks in the night he stumbles" (John 11:10). The other group

speaks of particular, specific, future suppositions, such as, "Lord, if

you will you can heal me" (Matt 8:2); "If someone should come to

them from the dead, they will repent" (Luke 16:30); "If I send them

away fasting they will faint in the way" (Mark 8:3). All these

examples share in common the ἐάν + subjunctive form.

If it seems strange to us that such distinct types should be thrown

together in one grammatical form it should alert us to the probability

that we are not looking at it as the Greek writer did. Apparently he

did not see these as diverse types; there must be some common

characteristic which in his mind linked them in the same manner of

expression. His choice to use the subjunctive points to the common

element. They are both undetermined, contingent suppositions, future

in time reference. Whether that potentiality was seen as some par-

ticular occurrence or one which would produce the result whenever it

occurred was not the primary thought in the mind of the speaker. He

used a form which in either case expressed the future eventuality.

Some grammarians do attempt to distinguish two separate classes.

W. W. Goodwin notes that "the character of the apodosis distinguishes

these future conditions from the present general supposition" and

claims that the present general class uses a present indicative or its

equivalent in the apodosis, while the future particular class has some

future form.51 Machen calls the ἐάν + subjunctive class "future

conditions," but in a footnote he calls attention to the fact that this

term takes no account of the large group of present general conditions

which share the structural form.52 Zerwick also distinguishes two

classes, the "eventual" and the "universal," warning, however, that

"the distinction between type C (eventual) and E (universal), though

certain grammarians make it, is not a linguistic or grammatical one,

but a purely extrinsic one based on subject matter (and an analysis

according to the speech-habits of some other language than Greek).”53

with the conclusions of another scholar an even wider difference was seen. It is not easy

to decide whether "If anyone wants to do His will he shall know. . ." (John 7: 17) or "If

you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:17) is expressing a general

truth always true, or is to be thought of as looking to some particular future situation.

The distinction is highly subjective, as well as totally without indication in the language

itself.

51 Goodwin, *Grammar*, 298.

52 Machen, *Greek for Beginners*, 132 n. 1.

53 Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 111.

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The term "present general" commonly used for the universal condition

is an unfortunate one, based probably on the claim by Goodwin

quoted above that the apodosis is a present indicative or its equivalent.

Elsewhere he speaks of this as a "quasi-present.”54 Zerwick uses still

another limiting designation of this present, "a general (universal)

condition in the (atemporal) present, referring to any case of the kind

expressed.”55

Thus Goodwin affirms and Zerwick denies that the form of the

apodosis indicates the distinction between the general and the par-

ticular sub-classification of this third-class. Again, without presuming

to evaluate the propriety of this as it applies to classical Greek, I have

in this study attempted to check its validity for the NT. The present

indicative occurs about 135 times in the apodoses of this class in the

NT, 81 times (61%) in those which I have classified as general, 52

times (38%) in those classified as particular. The future indicative

occurs 118 times, 18% in general examples, 82% in particular

examples. While these may conform in a *majority* of cases with the

proposed rule, yet 4 out of 10 or even l out of 5 is a high percent of

error.

But the problem is even greater. The rule as stated spoke of

"present indicative or its equivalent," and on the other hand "any

future form." When we ask more specifically for the *time-reference* of

the apodosis instead of the *tense form*, a very interesting factor

appears: in almost every instance the time-reference is discovered to

be future.

Let me illustrate and explain this conclusion. The apodosis uses

the imperative mood 45 times (27 present, 15 aorist, 1 aorist sub-

junctive with μή as a prohibition). Also, in another example the

apodosis is expressed by two participles which depend on an

imperative verb and in another by an infinitive of indirect discourse

representing an imperative in the direct. The imperative time-reference

is clearly future. On 12 occasions οὐ μή + aorist subjunctive, a strong

future denial, forms the apodosis. On 10 other times the aorist

subjunctive is used when the apodosis is a purpose clause with ἵνα,

etc. Once, the apodosis has πώς with the deliberative subjunctive.

Again, these are all future in time reference.

Next, examining the 81 examples of the present indicative in the

apodoses of general suppositions, it is probable that even these

represent future time. 20 of these seem to be gnomic or atemporal,

which includes future time. But specifically in the apodosis of a

54 W. W. Goodwin, "On the Classification of Conditional Sentences in Greek

Syntax," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 4 (1873) 66.

55 Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 111.

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contingent condition this present must be logically future to the

fulfillment of the protasis. Two examples of these presents are

"futuristic" ("I am coming," John 14:3; note that it is accompanied by

a future tense verb in the same apodosis). Another 21 instances

involve verbs which involve potential action looking forward to the

future: "I am able to . . ." etc. Some 26 express what I choose to label

"resulting action," what will happen or result when the protasis is

realized: "even if someone strives he is not crowned if he does not

strive lawfully" (2 Tim 2:5); "If we love one another God abides in us”

(I John 4:12); "If we ask anything. . . he hears us" (1 John 5:14). The

remaining 55 present indicatives in apodoses express what I have

called "discovered state," identifying the condition which will be

discovered to be true when the condition is met: "If you abide in me

you are truly my disciple" (John 8:31); "If I do not wash you, you do

not have a part with me" (John 13:8); "If you release this man you are

not a friend of Caesar" (John 19:12); "Circumcision is profitable if

you keep the law"(Rom 2:25); "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel"

(1 Cor 9: 16); "If we walk in the light. . . we have fellowship. . ."

(1 John 1:7).

The only apodosis verbs left to be considered are 7 aorist

indicatives. These I would consider to be expressive of "discovered

resulting action": "If he hears you, you have gained your brother

(Matt 18:15); "If anyone does not abide in me, he has been cast out

and has withered. . ." (John 15:6); "If you marry you have not

sinned" (I Cor 7:28, twice); "If a man enter your assembly and

you. . . , have you not discriminated and become judges. . . ?" (James

2:2-4).

It is not expected that everyone will agree with all of these

explanations, but certainly it is clear that there is no discernible

distinction in form in the NT Greek which will identify the two types

of conditional statements within the third class. In fact, there is some

future time-reference in all of the examples, even those which are

often called present-general. The general-particular may be a valid

distinction, but it depends on subject-matter and the interpretive

exegesis of the commentator, not on the Greek text of the NT.

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