

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 conditions within this third class is shown to be neither helpful nor indicated by NT Greek texts. All third class conditions are essentially future contingencies.

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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

¹There 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.

²Historical grammarians point out that in late Greek the distinction between *εἰ* and *ἐάν* seems to be fading. See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New*

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., εἰάν with ind., ὅτε with subj., ὅταν with indic., etc. In M Gr only the fuller conjunctions εἰάν 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 εἰάν 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 preceding verse, and apparently with precisely the same meaning), and 1 Cor 14:5 (where ἐκτός εἰ μή is a fixed formula). There are two examples of εἰάν with a present indicative: 1 Thess 3:8 and 1 John 5:15 (οἶδα is semantically present). These probably reflect the later confusion which used εἰάν for εἰ and thus should be classified as first-class. There are two examples of εἰάν with a future indicative (Luke 19:40; Acts 8:31) 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 subjunctives (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, εἰάν with a future indicative may be a normal third-class condition.

³The 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).

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

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 εἶν + 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 grammarians 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 subjunctive 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

⁵Robertson, *Grammar*, 912.

⁶*Ibid.*, 927.

⁷In 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."

⁸A. T. Robertson, *A Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929) 129-31.

⁹Robertson, *Grammar*, 928-34.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 1004-5.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 1016.

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 groupings. The results are seen in this tabulation, with the number so designated, and some examples.

Personal will, choice, judgment	53 ¹⁷
Spiritual condition	23 ¹⁸
Personal actions	109 ¹⁹
Actions of others	36 ²⁰
Ability, opportunity	4 ²¹
Providence or Futurity	61 ²²

¹²Ibid., 1018.

¹³Ibid., 924.

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

¹⁵W. 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.

¹⁶J. G. Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York: MacMillan, 1950) 132.

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

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

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

²⁰Examples: Matt 5:23; Luke 17:3, 4.

²¹Example: Matt 9:21.

²²Examples: Matt 18:12; Rom 7:3; 1 Cor 4:19; 14:28; 16:10; 1 John 2:28; 3:2.

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 conditions: 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

²³Robertson, *Grammar*, 1016, 1020.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 1016.

²⁵F. Blass, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Tr. by Henry St. John Thackeray. (London, MacMillan, 1911) 213, 214.

²⁶G. B. Winer, *A Grammar of the Idioms of the Greek Language of the New Testament* (Andover: Draper, 1897) 291.

²⁷E. D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1897) 104.

²⁸F. 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.

²⁹W. D. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1941) 198-99.

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 (optative) to *volitionally* possible (imperative), or from *probability* (subjunctive) 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 Condition” 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	19 ³²
Fulfillment probable	63 ³³
Fulfillment doubtful	20 ³⁴
Fulfillment improbable	16 ³⁵
Fulfillment possible	4 ³⁶
Fulfillment conceivable	30 ³⁷

³⁰H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1948) 165–67.

³¹*Ibid.*, 290.

³²In 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; Col 4:10; 1 John 2:29.

³³Examples: 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; Col 3:13; 1 John 2:1; 5:14.

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

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

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

³⁷Examples: Matt 21:21, 25, 26; Mark 3:24, 25; 14:31; Luke 16:30; John 21:22; Rom 2:26; 1 Cor 4:15; 12:15; Gal 1:18.

Certain <i>not</i> to be fulfilled	7 ³⁸
No indication of probability	120 ³⁹

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 conditions 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 preceding 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 *ἔάν* + 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

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

³⁹In 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; 1 Cor 4:19; Heb 3:7; James 5:15; Rev 2:5.

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 (1 Cor 4:19; James 4:15; Heb 6:3), a virgin may marry or not (1 Cor 7:28), a man or a woman may have long hair or not (1 Cor 11:14, 5), the Thessalonians may, or may not, stand fast in the Lord (1 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 classical grammarians and refer to a comparison between two classes of future condition, those using $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$ + subjunctive and those using $\epsilon\iota$ + 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

⁴⁰W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, rev. by C. B. Gulick (Boston: Ginn, 1930) 298.

⁴¹The correctness of this statement needs to be supported. There are 10 instances where $\epsilon\iota$ appears with an optative verb, thus possibly a fourth class protasis. Of these, one is not conditional at all: $\epsilon\iota$ is introducing an indirect question, “whether” (Acts 25:20; perhaps also 17:27). Five appear to be stereotyped, almost parenthetical expressions, the kind which might survive after the construction has become archaic ($\epsilon\iota$ τύχοι, 1 Cor 14:10; 15:37; $\epsilon\iota$ δύναιντο, Acts 27:12, 39; $\epsilon\iota$ δύνατον εἶν, Acts 20:16). The three remaining seem clearly to be fourth-class protases; one with an apodosis which is

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 expectation 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 (1 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.

⁴²Robertson, *Grammar*, 1020-21.

⁴³Duncan G. Gibbs, "The Third Class Condition in New Testament Usage" (Th. M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979) 51.

⁴⁴Goodwin, *Grammar*, 298.

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

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 accompanies 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 εἰάν 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 understanding of the third-class being presented in this paper, then εἰάν 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 εἰάν + subjunctive class there are two distinct⁵⁰ types of conditional statements. One

⁴⁶M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, trans. by Joseph Smith (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963) 111.

⁴⁷N. Turner, *Syntax*, 115.

⁴⁸Robertson, *Grammar*, 1017.

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

⁵⁰One 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

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 $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$ + 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 particular 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 $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$ + 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.

⁵¹Goodwin, *Grammar*, 298.

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

⁵³Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 111.

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 particular 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 1 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 subjunctive 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 πῶς 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

⁵⁴W. W. Goodwin, "On the Classification of Conditional Sentences in Greek Syntax," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 4 (1873) 66.

⁵⁵Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 111.

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 (1 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*" (1 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.