

# RELATIVE CLAUSES IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT: A STATISTICAL STUDY

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*Relative clauses form one of the two main forms of subordinate clauses in NT Greek. Relative clauses may function adjectivally, nominally, or adverbially. A special use of the relative clause is found in alternating clauses connected by μέν and δέ. A relative clause is introduced by a relative pronoun that relates the clause to an antecedent. Generally, the relative agrees with the antecedent in gender and number, but its case is determined by its function in its own clause. Examination of its use in the NT, however, reveals several categories of exceptions to this general rule. The use of moods in relative clauses is governed by the same principles as those in effect for independent clauses. Generally, there is little confusion over the use of relative pronouns and their antecedents. However, there are a few problem passages (e.g., Matt 26:50; 2 Pet 1:4; 3:6; and 1 John 3:20).*

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## INTRODUCTION

**S**TRUCTURALLY there are two main forms of subordinate clauses in NT Greek: those introduced by relatives and those by conjunctions. The relative clauses are the subject of this article.<sup>1</sup>

A relative clause is introduced by a relative word, either a relative pronoun or adjective or adverb. The statement made by the

<sup>1</sup>Statistical information used in the preparation of this article was generated using GRAMCORD, a computer-based grammatical concordance of the Greek NT (see my article, "Project Gramcord: A Report," *GTJ* 1 [1980] 97-99). The present article is part of the following series of my articles based on GRAMCORD published in *GTJ*: "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" *GTJ* 2 (1981) 75-114; "Second Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 81-88; "Third (and Fourth) Class Conditions," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 163-75; "Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek," *GTJ* 4 (1983) 173-88; "The Classification of Participles: A Statistical Study," *GTJ* 5 (1984) 163-79; "The Classification of Infinitives: A Statistical Study," *GTJ* 6

relative clause might stand alone as an independent sentence, but the speaker chooses to “relate” it subordinately to some noun or other substantival expression in the main clause by using a special relative word for that purpose. The element to which it is related is called the antecedent.

The relative pronouns that will be under consideration in this study are the regular relative, ὅς, ἥ, ὅ, the indefinite relative ὅστις, ἥτις, ὅτι, the correlatives ὅσος, οἷος, ὅποῖος, and ἡλικός. The last four sometimes also function adjectivally and the last only as an adjective. Clauses introduced by relative adverbs could also be included in a study of relative clauses, but they are sufficiently distinctive to merit separate consideration as adverbial clauses.<sup>2</sup> However, those clauses introduced by an adverbial phrase that incorporates the relative pronoun (such as ἀνθ’ ὧν or ἕως οὗ) will be included here since they involve a relative pronoun directly.<sup>3</sup>

#### CLASSIFICATION OF RELATIVE CLAUSES

Clauses may be analyzed on the bases of structure (main, coordinate, or subordinate), grammatical function (nominal, adjectival, or adverbial), and semantical function. Relative clauses are subordinate and may function in any of the grammatical categories listed. Semantically, relative clauses may be classified as temporal, conditional, causal, modal (manner), purpose, or result.

#### *Adjectival Relative Clauses*

The primary, basic significance of the relative clause is adjectival. In a sense all relative clauses are adjectival. Like the substantive use of an adjective, a relative clause by the omission of the antecedent can become a substantive or noun clause. And by association with various words and with prepositions the adjective may become adverbial. But

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(1985) 29–48; “The Classification of Subjunctives: A Statistical Study,” *GTJ* 7 (1986) 3–19; “A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study,” *GTJ* 8 (1987) 35–54; and “The Classification of Optatives: A Statistical Study,” *GTJ* 9 (1988) 129–40. Informational materials and listings generated in the preparation of this article may be found in my “Supplemental Manual of Information: Relative Clauses” (available through interlibrary loan from the Morgan Library, Grace Theological Seminary, 200 Seminary Drive, Winona Lake, IN 46590). Information about GRAMCORD is available through my co-developer Paul R. Miller, Project GRAMCORD, 18897 Deerpath Road, Wildwood, IL 60030.

<sup>2</sup>I plan to undertake a statistical study of adverbial clauses in the future.

<sup>3</sup>There is one use of the relative pronoun that does not always involve a clause, and thus does not fall strictly within the scope indicated by the title of this paper. However, since it usually does so, it will be included. See “The Alternating Use of the Relative,” below.

the true adjectival use is by far the most frequent (1079 [64%] out of 1680).

Adjectival relative clauses may be descriptive or restrictive (identifying), just as other adjectives. Adjectival clauses are descriptive when they ascribe a quality or attribute to the antecedent, and restrictive when they define or identify the antecedent. The two categories are not mutually exclusive, and they may overlap, requiring subjective judgment on the part of the interpreter. For example, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς = 'from whom Jesus was born' (Matt 1:16) could be describing Mary as Jesus' mother, or it could be distinguishing her from others of the same name (i.e., the Mary who bore Jesus). The context seems to suggest the descriptive sense. But in spite of the subjectivity, the distinction is real and useful. In Matt 2:6 the sense is clearly descriptive ("a Ruler, who will shepherd My people Israel").<sup>4</sup> In Matt 2:9 the relative clause is clearly restrictive ("the star, which they had seen in the East"). There are, based on my judgment, 225 descriptive and 432 restrictive relative clauses in the NT.<sup>5</sup>

Another category needs to be recognized which goes beyond the functions of regular adjectives. Blass, in his treatment of sentence structure, speaks of two types of Greek prose; the periodic style, characterized by artistically developed prose, and the running or continuous style, characterized by plain and unsophisticated language. The running style is found in two patterns. One pattern has a series of separate sentences, usually connected by καί. The other pattern extends the first statement by means of participial phrases, clauses introduced by ὅτι, or relative clauses. Blass defines this 'Relative Connective' as "a loosening of the connection of the relative clause to the preceding complex sentence; something intermediate between a relative clause and a demonstrative clause: ὅς = and this, but this, this very thing."<sup>6</sup>

The relative connective use of the relative clause becomes quite obvious when modern speech English versions of the NT are compared with older translations that follow the grammar of the Greek. Long sentences are broken down into many shorter ones in conformity to modern style. In many instances the break occurs where the Greek has a relative. For example, Paul's "long sentence," Eph 1:4-14, is divided by the *KJV* into three sentences; the last two sentences open with a relative clause. The *NASB* and the *NIV* break it into six sentences; after the first sentence all but two breaks come at

<sup>4</sup>Translations will be given from the *NASB* unless otherwise stated.

<sup>5</sup>Lists of these and many other helpful details which cannot be included in this article are available in the supplementary manual listed in n. 1.

<sup>6</sup>BDF, 239.

a relative. Even the Nestle<sup>26</sup> Greek text divides the passage into four sentences; after the opening one each begins with a relative.

Another indication that the Greek relative serves as a connective is seen in an examination of the ways in which the *NASB*, which follows the Greek syntax more closely than other modern versions, translates the relative in the NT. In approximately 10% of all occurrences (160 out of 1680) it translates the relative by using a personal or demonstrative pronoun, even on occasion inserting a noun, thus removing the “relation” supplied by the relative.

Such relative connectives are still adjectival and could probably be classified as either descriptive or restrictive, but the consideration that has prompted their separate treatment is the fact that they move the thought of the sentence into a new area. By my count, there are 422 relative connectives in the NT.

### *Nominal Relative Clauses*

There are 473 relative clauses in the NT for which the antecedent of the relative pronoun is lacking, left to be supplied, or understood. The relative pronoun is usually translated by “the one who,” “that which,” or “what” (= “that which,” not the interrogative). Actually, it is better to consider the relative as containing in itself its antecedent, and the entire clause becomes in effect a substantive.<sup>7</sup> The clause itself becomes the subject or object of the sentence, or fills some other function in the sentence.

When a nominal relative clause comes at the beginning or early in a sentence, it sometimes happens that a redundant personal or demonstrative pronoun is used later in the sentence. The redundant pronoun is called a pleonastic pronoun. This construction was found in Classical Greek, but it is much more common in biblical Greek, due probably to the influence of a similar Semitic idiom.

A nominal relative clause may be categorized according to its function in a sentence. The two most common functions are subject or direct object of a verb, but other noun functions are found as well.

#### Subject of the Verb

Of the nominal relative clauses, 139 (29%) serve as subject of a sentence. Examples are Luke 7:4; ἄξιός ἐστιν ὃ παρέξη τοῦτο, “the

<sup>7</sup>Grammarians describe this situation differently. For example, BAGD (p. 583) says, “A demonstrative pron. is freq. concealed within the relative pron.” But W. W. Goodwin (*Greek Grammar*, rev. C. B. Gulick [Boston: Ginn, 1930] 219) says, “In such cases it is a mistake to say that ταῦτα, ἐκεῖνοι, etc. are *understood*. . . . The relative clause here really becomes a substantive, and contains its antecedent within itself.”

one to whom you should grant this is worthy” (my translation; the *NASB* alters the sentence structure, “He is worthy for you to grant this to him”) and John 1:33: ἐφ’ ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων, “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes.” The last example illustrates also the pleonastic pronoun, οὗτος, which repeats the subject. Eleven subject clauses use a pleonastic pronoun.

### Direct Object of the Verb

The largest number of the nominal relative clauses, 222 (47%), function as direct object of the verb; in 31 instances a pleonastic pronoun is also used. Mark 1:44 illustrates this object clause: προσένεγκε περὶ τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ σου ἃ προσέταξεν Μωϋσῆς, “offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded.” In Rom 7:15, 16 this construction occurs four times, three of them with the pleonastic pronoun (e.g., ἀλλ’ ὃ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ, “the thing I hate, this I do” [my translation]).

### Other Nominative

Other than as subject, the nominal relative clause is found in a nominative case relationship most frequently as a predicative nominative in a copulative sentence (19 times). An example is found in John 1:30: οὗτός ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εἶπον, “This is He on behalf of whom I said.” In four instances there may be a nominative absolute construction (Matt 10:14; 23:16, 18; and 1 Tim 3:16).

### Other Accusative

Other than as direct object, the nominal relative clause is in an accusative relationship 17 times: as object of a preposition (10 times); as the complement of a direct objective (twice); and once each as accusative of person, of thing, and of respect; in apposition to a direct object; and subject of an infinitive. For example, in 2 Cor 12:20 μή πως ἐλθὼν οὐκ οἶους θέλω εὑρῶ ὑμᾶς κἀγὼ εὑρεθῶ ὑμῖν οἷον οὐ θέλετε, “afraid that . . . I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish,” the clause οὐχ οἶους θέλω is the complement to the direct object ὑμᾶς. In the latter part of the sentence the same construction is somewhat obscured by the verb changing to passive. Col 3:6 is an example of a nominal relative clause as accusative object of a preposition: δι’ ἧ ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, “on account of which things the wrath of God comes” (my translation).

### Genitive Substantive

The nominal relative clause occurs in a genitive relation to the sentence 31 times: as genitive object of a preposition (17 times), as a partitive genitive (6 times), as an exegetical genitive (4 times), as a genitive of comparison (twice), as a genitive of relationship (once), and as a genitive of content (once). An example of a partitive genitive is found in Rom 15:18: οὐ γὰρ τολμήσω τι λαλεῖν ὧν οὐ κατειργάσατο Χριστὸς δι' ἐμοῦ, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." A genitive of comparison is found in John 7:31: ὁ Χριστὸς ὅταν ἔλθῃ μὴ πλείονα σημεῖα ποιήσει ὧν οὗτος ἐποίησεν; "When the Christ will come, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?"

### Dative Substantive

The nominal relative clause is dative 41 times (13 with a pleonastic pronoun): as indirect object (19 times), as object of a preposition (15 times), as dative of possession (5 times), and once each as dative of respect and of instrument. An example of an indirect object is found in Gal 3:19: τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται, "the seed . . . to whom the promise had been made." A dative of possession is found in Mark 11:23: ὃς ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ . . . ἔσται αὐτῷ, "whoever says to this mountain . . . it shall be granted him [literally 'it shall be to him', or, 'it shall be his']." Here the pleonastic pronoun αὐτῷ helps to identify the case and the construction.

### Adverbial Clauses

Ninety times in the NT the relative, together with a preposition or some specific word expressing an adverbial idea, or both, becomes an introductory phrase for a clause functioning adverbially. The adverbial sense does not derive from the relative but from the preposition and the antecedent of the relative. Fuller treatment of adverbial clauses (including those introduced by a relative) is planned for a future study, but a brief discussion is included here for the sake of completeness.

### Temporal Clauses

Of the approximately 420 subordinate temporal clauses in the NT, 57 are introduced by a relative phrase. The temporal sense is indicated by the antecedent of the relative, sometimes expressed but more commonly omitted. When it is not stated it can be determined reasonably by the gender of the relative and the analogy of instances where it is used. The antecedent most frequently is χρόνος in its proper case form (47 times, 5 of them actually expressed), then ἡμέρα

(9 times, 7 expressed), and ὥρα (once only, understood from the context). The simple relative ὃς is used in 36 instances, ὅστις is seen 5 times in the phrase ἕως ὄτου, and the correlative ὅσος 6 times.

The actual phrases and the number of occurrences in the NT are listed here. Brackets indicate that the antecedent is left to be understood:

ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας	3
ἀφ' ἧς [ἡμέρας	2
ἀφ' ἧς [ὥρας	1
ἀφ' οὗ [χρόνου	4
ἐν ᾧ [χρόνῳ	4
ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον	2
ἐφ' ὅσον [χρόνον	1
ὅσον χρόνον	3
ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας	4
ἄχρι οὗ [χρόνου	4
ἄχρις οὗ [χρόνου	5
μέχρι οὗ [χρόνου	2
ἕως οὗ [χρόνου	17
ἕως ὄτου [χρόνου	5

### Causal Clauses

There are 16 clauses classified as causal clauses introduced by relative phrases. The causal sense is indicated by the prepositions used, by the antecedent, or by both. The phrases and number of occurrences are:

δι' ἣν αἰτίαν	5
δι' ἣν	1
ἣν αἰτίαν	1
ἀνθ' ὧν	5
ἐφ' ᾧ	2
εἵνεκεν οὗ	1
οὗ χάριν	1

Διά with accusative, εἵνεκεν and χάριν all mean 'on account of', or 'because of'. Ἀνθ' ὧν 'in exchange for these things' may be understood as "because of these things." Ἐφ' ᾧ may be contracted from ἐφ' ᾧ τούτῳ ὅτι 'for this reason that' or 'because'.<sup>8</sup> Six times the causal sense is shown by αἰτία as the antecedent, one time without a preposition. Once (2 Pet 3:12), δι' ἣν clearly has ἡμέρας as its antecedent, not αἰτία, yet the sense is causal rather than temporal, as διὰ

<sup>8</sup>Cf. BAGD, 287.

with the accusative requires. Nine times the relative is neuter with no antecedent, pointing to the general context for the reason or cause.<sup>9</sup>

### Clauses Expressing Degree or Measure

Ten adverbial relative clauses express degree or measure, in each case introduced by the correlative ὅσος, a word involving the idea of quantity or measure. The adverbial clause answers the questions, how much? or to what degree?

In three of these clauses the relative has an adverb as its antecedent (μᾶλλον in Mark 7:36, and μικρόν (twice) in Heb 10:37). Actually the last two do not involve a clause at all, functioning as simple adverbs. These are unusual constructions, but not improper.

### Clauses Expressing Manner

The phrases ὃν τρόπον (5 times) and καθ' ὃν τρόπον (twice) both mean "according to the manner which." These phrases clearly introduce a clause of manner.

### Other Adverbial Clauses?

Mention should be made here of certain relative clauses, called by some grammarians "conditional relative clauses" and "relative purpose clauses" (and a few others which, if valid, should be included here but are not). I have previously discussed "conditional relative clauses," and concluded that, while the clauses may contain a suggestion of condition, they are not, and should not be, classified as conditional sentences.<sup>10</sup>

The situation is much the same with the so-called "relative purpose clause," or other clauses that may suggest other adverbial senses. As A. T. Robertson says,

Almost any sentence is capable of being changed into some other form as a practical equivalent. The relative clause may indeed have a resultant effect of cause, condition, purpose or result, but in itself it expresses none of these things. It is like the participle in this respect. One must not read into it more than is there . . .<sup>11</sup> As in Latin, the relative clause may imply cause, purpose, result, concession or condition, though the sentence itself does not say this much. This is due to the logical relation in the sentence. The sense glides from mere explanation to ground or

<sup>9</sup>Some see a similar causal or instrumental sense in some of the occurrences of ἐν ᾧ (Rom 8:3; 14:21; Heb 2:18; 6:17). Cf. BAGD, 261.

<sup>10</sup>See my article, "Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek," 185-86.

<sup>11</sup>A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 956.



reason. . . .<sup>12</sup> The indefinite relative like ὃς ἂν θέλη (Mk. 8:35) or ὅστις ὁμολογήσει (Mt. 10:32) is quite similar in idea to a conditional clause with ἂν τις or εἴ τις. But, after all, it is not a conditional sentence any more than the so-called causal, final, consecutive relative clauses are really so. It is only by the context that anyone inferentially gets any of these ideas out of the relative.<sup>13</sup>

### *Alternating Use of Relative with Μέν, Δέ*

The relative pronoun is used with the particles μέν and δέ to express alternatives, such as are expressed in English by "the one . . . the other" or "some . . . others." This is about the only remainder in NT Greek of an original demonstrative sense of the relative pronoun.<sup>14</sup> The article also (ὁ μέν . . . ὁ δέ) is used in this alternating construction, reflecting the same historical origin as a demonstrative. Certain other words, ἄλλος (24 times), ἕτερος (10 times), and the indefinite τινές (5 times), are also so used. Often these different patterns are mixed together in one set of such alternative expressions. Even ἄλλος and ἕτερος mingle in the same set in a way that seems to defy explanation (cf. 1 Cor 12:8-10). The number of occurrences in the NT for these alternating expressions are as follows:

Relatives only (ὃς μέν . . . ὃς δέ)	13
Article only (ὁ μέν . . . ὁ δέ)	10
Other words only	9
Relative combined with article	2
Relative combined with other words	5
Article combined with other words	7
Total sets of alternatives	46
Total number of relatives involved	38

The sets may consist of two alternatives (26 times), of three (11 times), of four (6 times), and one set of nine alternatives.

The first item in the list is not always marked by μέν (9 exceptions). Instead, the numeral εἷς, the indefinite pronoun τινές, the demonstrative article οἱ δέ, even a noun (Heb 11:35) and a partitive genitive phrase (John 7:40), all without μέν, may constitute the first item. The alternate items of each list are almost invariably marked by δέ; the only exceptions are in the parallel passages, Mark 4:5 and Luke 8:6, where καὶ ἄλλα or καὶ ἕτερον is found, respectively. 1 Cor 12:28, with οὓς μέν but no succeeding δέ, does not fit the "some . . .

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 960.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 961-62.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 695-96.

other" pattern; the numbered items following the first are not alternatives to, but descriptions of, the first. Thus it is not classified in this group.

#### THE MECHANICS OF RELATIVE CLAUSES

In this section the various relative pronouns will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the antecedents. Finally, the matter of agreement between relative pronouns and their antecedents will be analyzed.

##### *The Relative Pronoun*

By far the most frequently used relative pronoun is ὅς, ἣ, ὅ (1395 times, or 83% of the total). It is found in almost every gender, number, and case, and in every functional classification except one, where the sense calls for the quantitative ὅσος.

Ὅστις, ἣτις, ὅ τι is second in frequency (153 or 9%). This word is a compound of the common relative ὅς and the indefinite pronoun τις, with both parts of the compound experiencing inflection. This compounding with the indefinite and the use of the word in the early Greek gave it the name Indefinite Relative. But the name is no longer appropriate in the Greek of the NT. Blass says that ὅς and ὅστις "are no longer clearly distinguished in the NT."<sup>15</sup> W. F. Howard<sup>16</sup> shows that ὅστις occurs almost solely in the nominative case and in the accusative neuter, the only exception being an old genitive singular neuter form surviving in the stereotyped phrase ἕως οὗτου. N. Turner says,

Already in the Koine the distinction between the relative pronoun of individual and definite reference (ὅς and ὅσος) and that of general and indeterminate reference (ὅστις and ὅπως) has become almost completely blurred. Indeed in general relative clauses ὅς is the rule, and although ὅστις is still used occasionally in its proper sense of *whoever*, it is nearly always misused, by Attic standards, of a definite and particular person.<sup>17</sup>

Cadbury<sup>18</sup> makes the difference almost a matter of inflection, asserting that in Luke the normal inflection is ὅς, ἣτις, ὅ (nominative singular) and οἵτινες, αἵτινες, ἅ (nominative plural).

<sup>15</sup>BDF, 152.

<sup>16</sup>W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 2, *Accidence and Word Formation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 179.

<sup>17</sup>N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 47.

<sup>18</sup>H. J. Cadbury, "The Relative Pronouns in Acts and Elsewhere," *JBL* 42 (1923) 150-57. He claims only four exceptions in about 200 occurrences.

Ὅσος is a correlative pronoun which adds the concept of quantity to the relative concept and can be translated "as much as," "how much," or "as great as." It is used of space and time, of quantity and number, or of measure and degree. With πάντες it means "all who." With the correlative demonstrative τοσοῦτος it describes one item by comparing it with another quantitatively. It occurs 110 times in the NT (about 6.5% of the relatives) and in every major classification of relative uses.

Οἷος is much like ὅσος but is qualitative rather than quantitative. It is usually translated "of what sort" or "such as." It is used in simple relative clauses and in indirect questions and exclamations. Only 14 instances occur (less than 1%).

Ὅποιος, like οἷος, is qualitative, "of what sort." It is used, much as οἷος, in simple relative clauses and in indirect questions. There are only 5 occurrences (less than 0.3%). Ὅπόσος ("how great," "how much"), which relates to ὅσος in the same way that ὁποιος does to οἷος, does not occur at all in the NT.

Ἡλίκος, "how large," "how small," occurs only three times in the NT, always of size or stature (its cognate noun ἡλικία is used both of age and stature). The pronoun is used only in indirect questions.

### *The Antecedent*

#### Definitions

A pronoun is a standardized, abbreviated substitute for a noun. Every pronoun has an antecedent, the nominal in place of which the pronoun stands. A relative pronoun introduces a subordinate relative clause that makes an assertion about the pronoun's antecedent. In Luke 2:10 the angel said "I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all people." By dropping the relative "which" and repeating the antecedent "joy" the statement may be restated as two sentences: "I bring you good news of a great joy. That great joy shall be for all people." Thus the relative is the subordinating link and the antecedent is the point of linkage in putting together two clauses.

#### Grammatical Form of Antecedent

The antecedent of a relative pronoun may be a simple noun or a substantival expression. By approximate count, 900 antecedents of relative pronouns are nouns, 150 are pronouns, 160 are other substantival expressions, 100 are the subject expressed in the person and number of the verb, and 340 antecedents are left to be understood from the context. Very unusual are three whose antecedent is an

adverb (see above under the heading, Clauses Expressing Degree or Measure).

The large number of noun antecedents needs no comment. The pronouns are mostly personal or demonstrative. The pleonastic pronoun antecedent will be discussed below. Also, the antecedent found in the inflection of the verb is self-explanatory. Of the other substantival expressions, a pronominal adjective is found most often as the antecedent of a relative pronoun (forms of *πᾶς* [50+ times]; its opposite *οὐδεὶς* [13 times]; specific numbers like *εἷς* or *δώδεκα* [10 times]; and indefinite numbers like *πολύς*, *ἄλλος*, *ἕτερος*, and *λοιπός* [17 times]). Other substantival adjectives account for about 25 antecedents. Substantival participles are antecedents in 38 instances. In three places (Acts 2:39, 2 Tim 1:15, Heb 12:25–26) the antecedent is an attributive prepositional phrase. A quoted scriptural passage that functions as a noun clause is used as the antecedent of a relative pronoun in Eph 6:2. Even an infinitive serves as an antecedent in Phil 4:10.

In many places the relative has no specific antecedent stated in the sentence (about 340 times). In some of these cases it is possible to supply from the context a word which may be given as an understood antecedent. But in most of these cases the antecedent is rather to be seen as implicit in the relative itself. Often the clue is in the gender of the relative. Masculine and feminine may mean “the one who.” Neuter may mean “the thing which,” “that which,” or “what.” The neuter relative may also be used to refer generally to the idea or sense of the context. This implicit or “understood”<sup>19</sup> antecedent is especially common when a relative clause itself functions as a noun clause, and the antecedent implicit in the relative explains why a following pronoun is called pleonastic or redundant.

### Location of Antecedent

The very term antecedent suggests that the antecedent comes before the relative, as it actually does in 1089 cases (about 82%). But in 244 cases the antecedent follows the relative in the sentence. If one subtracts the 69 places where the pleonastic pronoun is counted as an antecedent following the relative, there are 175 cases (less than 13%) in which the antecedent follows the relative.

How far before or after the relative the antecedent may be found is not easy to summarize even with all the statistics at hand. Counting inclusively (that is, a count of two means it is the next word) a few observations may be helpful. Full statistics are available.

<sup>19</sup>See n. 7.

## Antecedent before relative:

Next word before	39%
5 words or less before	25%
10 to 20 words before	10%
over 20 words before	3%

## Antecedent after relative:

Next word after	25%
5 words or less after	71%
10 to 20 words after	31%
over 20 words after	4%

*Agreement*<sup>20</sup>

Since a relative has connections with both the antecedent and the relative clause, its grammatical identifiers (gender, number, and case) do double duty. Normally, gender and number agree with the antecedent, but the case of the relative is determined by its grammatical function in its own clause. This normal rule is true in the NT more than 96% of the time. The exceptions to this rule are often called by grammarians “ad sensum” agreement, i.e., agreement in sense but not in grammatical form. The exceptions may be listed in five categories.

## Natural or Real Versus Grammatical Gender and Number

There are 25 examples in the NT that may be classified in this category. Words like ἔθνος, τέκνον, and πλῆθος are grammatically neuter, but since they refer to people, sometimes masculine relatives are used with them. Words like καρπός, σπόρος are grammatically masculine, but they really are things, so neuter relatives may be used with them. Θηρίον is neuter, but when it is used of the human “beast” of the Revelation, a masculine relative is used. Κεφαλή is feminine, but when it is used as a figure for Christ as head of the church, a masculine relative is used. This real versus grammatical distinction sometimes effects agreement in number also. Οὐρανός, whether singular or plural in grammatical form, may mean simply “heaven,” and once (Phil 3:20) the plural form is antecedent to a singular relative. Similarly, ὕδωρ in the singular is found once as the antecedent of a plural relative (2 Pet 3:6). Ναός is singular, but when it is used collectively for the people of God (1 Cor 3:17), it is referred to by οἵτινες, a plural relative. In Luke 6:17–18 πλῆθος, a neuter

<sup>20</sup>For the rest of this section on the mechanics of relative clauses, I have depended largely on the thorough work of A. T. Robertson (*Grammar*, 714–22). Very helpful also is the discussion of ὅς in BAGD, 583–85.

singular antecedent, is found with the masculine plural οἱ as relative, illustrating natural or real agreement in both gender and number.

### Translation Formulas

A rather distinct group (7 instances) of these “ad sensum” agreements involve a formula for the translation of names of persons, places, titles, etc., from one language to another. The formula appears in six closely related forms, all of which begin with the neuter relative pronoun, ὃ. The specific phrases and their number of occurrences in the NT are as follows:

ὃ ἐστίν	6 <sup>21</sup>
ὃ ἐστίν μεθερμηνευόμενον	5 <sup>22</sup>
ὃ ἐστίν λεγόμενος	1 <sup>23</sup>
ὃ λέγεται	2 <sup>24</sup>
ὃ λέγεται μεθερμηνευόμενον	1 <sup>25</sup>
ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται	2 <sup>26</sup>

The antecedent usually is a word that has no grammatical gender in Greek, and the neuter relative is a natural one if we understand it to refer to the “word” itself rather than that which it designates, mentally supplying ῥῆμα or ὄνομα.

### Agreement with Predicate Substantives<sup>27</sup>

Some of the exceptions to the rule of agreement show an agreement of a different kind; the relative clause is a copulative one with a predicate substantive, and the relative agrees in gender with the predicate substantive rather than with the antecedent in the main clause. An example is found in Eph 6:17: τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστίν ῥῆμα θεοῦ, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The actual antecedent is μάχαιραν (feminine), but the predicate substantive, which is of course referring to the same thing, is ῥῆμα (neuter), and the relative neuter agrees with it. In every instance the predicate substantive is more prominent than the actual antecedent.

<sup>21</sup>Mark 7:11, 34; 12:42; 15:16, 42; Heb 7:2.

<sup>22</sup>Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:41; Acts 4:36.

<sup>23</sup>Matt 27:33.

<sup>24</sup>John 19:17; 20:16.

<sup>25</sup>John 1:38.

<sup>26</sup>John 1:42; 9:7.

<sup>27</sup>Nine instances: Mark 7:11; 15:16, 42; Gal 3:16; Eph 6:17; 2 Thess 3:17; 1 Tim 3:15; Rev 4:5; 5:8.

Neuter of General Notion<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes the antecedent seems to be not some specific word but the general notion, the concept. Col 3:14 has an example: ἐπὶ πᾶσιν δὲ τούτοις τὴν ἀγάπην, ὃ ἐστὶν σύνδεσμος τῆς τελειότητος, “And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.” The antecedent is ἀγάπην (feminine), but the sense suggested by the neuter relative seems to be “that thing, quality, which is the uniting bond.”

## Neuter of Abstraction

In the NT as also classical Greek, and especially in John’s writings, the neuter is frequently used of a person when he is being thought of in an abstract way. This happens at least 6 times<sup>29</sup> in which a neuter relative is used to refer to an antecedent who is obviously a person. An example is found in John 17:24: Πάτερ, ὃ δέδωκάς μοι, θέλω ἵνα ὅπου ἐμὶ ἐγὼ κάκεῖνοι ᾧσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ, “Father, I desire that they also whom [the neuter, ὃ] Thou has given Me be with Me where I am.” The antecedent is obviously not impersonal. This abstract neuter is used elsewhere of God (John 4:22) and of men (John 6:37, 39; 17:2; 1 John 5:4).

1 John 1:1–3 has a list of five relative clauses serving as object of a verb in v 3. The relatives are all ὃ (neuter) and the antecedent is not stated. Two interpretations are conceivable: one is impersonal (“we proclaim to you the message which”), the other is personal (“we proclaim to you the One who”). The obvious parallel to the prologue of the gospel of John strongly indicates the personal view, and the use of the expression ὃ . . . αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν, “which our hands handled” (my translation) requires the personal view—one cannot feel a message with his hands. What should be noted particularly here is that the neuter does not require the impersonal interpretation. It may refer in an abstract way to “all He was and did, abstract Deity.”

## Some General Considerations

First, it should be noted that above exceptions to the rule of agreement are not mutually exclusive; some instances fit into two

<sup>28</sup>Seven instances: Matt 12:4; Gal 2:20; Eph 5:4, 5; Col 3:14; 2 Thess 3:17; 1 Tim 2:10.

<sup>29</sup>John 17:24; 1 John 1:1–3 (5 times). There are other places where the neuter relative has a grammatically neuter antecedent (πᾶν), so that the gender mismatch is obscured: John 6:37, 39; 17:2.

of the categories. For example, three relatives listed as translation of foreign words also show agreement with the predicate substantive.

Second, a large number of these “ad sensum” agreements involve the neuter gender (about three-fourths of the total), and a large number involve the specific phrase ὃ ἔστιν. That raises the possibility that the phrase has become a stereotyped expression in which the gender is “neutral” rather than neuter, like the Latin *id est*, “that is,” used in English and written in abbreviation, “i.e.” A careful study shows that ὃ ἔστιν often seems to act like that, but there are other times when it preserves normal agreement in all three genders, so such a conclusion cannot be certain. Another phrase, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν, “that is,” is totally neutral in gender and equals the use of “i.e.”

Third, “ad sensum” agreement is not peculiar to Greek. It is a very natural construction which usually causes no problem of interpretation.

### Attraction<sup>30</sup>

Attraction involves the case of the relative and antecedent. The normal rule is that case is determined by the grammatical function of the relative within its own clause. But there are exceptions to the general rule in which the relative is attracted to the case of the antecedent.

The situations that produce the exceptions to the general rule involve a relative whose case is attracted to the case of the antecedent (a phenomenon also found in classical Greek, particularly if the relative clause was separated from the antecedent by other modifiers). Most often (50 times in the NT), the attraction involves a relative whose grammatical function in its clause calls for an accusative, but the antecedent is either dative or genitive; in such circumstances, the relative is generally attracted to the case of the antecedent. In addition, there are 10 instances in the NT where the grammatical function of a relative calls for the dative case, but the case is attracted to the case of a genitive antecedent. Cases of non-attraction are rare in the NT (Heb 8:2 and a few variant readings for other passages).

### Inverse Attraction

Sometimes the reverse of what I have described as attraction occurs; the antecedent is attracted to the case of the relative. An example is found in Matt 21:42: λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκο-

<sup>30</sup>Grammarians do not agree on the terminology here. Goodwin (*Grammar*, 220–21) uses the word “assimilation” for what most grammarians call “attraction,” and “attraction” for what others call “incorporation.”



δομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone” (cf. Mark 12:10 and Luke 20:17). The “stone” is the subject of the verb ἐγενήθη and as such would be nominative, but it is attracted to the case of the relative ὄν which is accusative as direct object of its clause. Note also the pleonastic οὗτος. Also note that in 1 Pet 2:7 the same quotation is given without this inverse attraction; λίθος is nominative. In 1 Cor 10:16 inverse attraction occurs twice, both ποτήριον and ἄρτον are subjects of their clauses but are attracted to the accusative case of the relatives. Luke 12:10 shows inverse attraction from dative to nominative case. Inverse attraction in the NT involves the use of an accusative for a nominative (7 times), an accusative for a genitive (4 times), an accusative for a dative (once), a nominative for a dative (once), a dative for an accusative (once), and a dative for a genitive (once).

Inverse attraction usually happens when the relative clause precedes the main clause, but the antecedent is pulled forward (for emphasis) to a position just before the relative. In some instances anacoluthon may be involved; the case of the antecedent results from a grammatical construction which is begun, but not completed.<sup>31</sup>

### Incorporation

Frequently (42 times) the antecedent is moved out of its position in the main clause and incorporated into the relative clause. When this happens, the antecedent does not have an article, it usually does not follow immediately after the relative (except in a few set phrases: ὄν τρόπον, ἡ ἡμέρα, ἡ ὥρα, δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν), and it is in the same case as the relative, either by attraction or because both have the same natural case. Examples are found in Mark 6:16, ὄν ἐγὼ ἀποκεφάλισα Ἰωάννην, οὗτος ἠγέρθη, “John, whom I beheaded, he has risen” and Luke 19:37, περὶ πασῶν ὧν εἶδον δυνάμεων, “for all the miracles which they had seen.”

### With Prepositions

When either or both the antecedent and the relative stand in a prepositional phrase, a variety of forms may result. The preposition may appear with both (e.g., Acts 20:18: ἀπὸ πρώτης ἡμέρας ἀφ’ ἧς), with the relative only (e.g., John 4:53: ἐκείνη τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐν ἣ), or with the antecedent only (e.g., Acts 1:21: ἐν παντὶ χρόνῳ ᾧ εἰσηλθεν). If the antecedent is unexpressed, the preposition may be the one common to both (e.g., 2 Cor 2:3: ἀφ’ ὧν), the one which belongs to the relative (e.g., Luke 17:1: δι’ οὗ = τούτῳ δι’ οὗ), or the one which

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Robertson, *Grammar*, 718.

would have been used with the antecedent (e.g., John 17:9:  $\text{περὶ ὧν} = \text{περὶ τούτων οὕς}$ ).

#### MOODS USED IN RELATIVE CLAUSES

The relative has no affect whatever on the mood. The mood in relative clauses is governed by the same principles as it would be in an independent clause, and conveys the same semantic significance.

##### *Indicative*

The indicative is the most common mood used in relative clauses (1436 [84%] out of 1680). All the tenses are represented.

##### *Subjunctive*

The subjunctive also is used frequently (159 times [9%]). Only present subjunctives (38 times) and aorist subjunctives (121 times) are found in relative clauses in the NT.

The basic significance of the subjunctive mood is potentiality or indefiniteness, both involving futurity. This element is always present in relative clauses which use a subjunctive verb.

##### *Οὐ Μὴ with the Subjunctive*

Elsewhere<sup>32</sup> this use of the subjunctive in emphatic future assertions has been discussed. It is usually found in main clauses but may be used anywhere an indicative can be used. The strangeness of the use of the subjunctive for emphatic assertion may be explained by the significance of the two negatives. The  $\mu\eta$  immediately preceding the subjunctive verb negates the verb, making the clause a doubtful assertion. The  $\text{o}\ddot{\upsilon}$  before the  $\mu\eta$  negates the doubtfulness, making the total expression mean "not doubtful," "no doubt about it." Thus, the subjunctive is a "positively negated" future potentiality. It is found in 8 relative clauses in the NT, involving 9 subjunctive verbs.<sup>33</sup>

##### *Indefinite Relative Clauses*

These are the clauses which in English add the suffix "ever" to the relative introducing the clause ("whoever" or "whatever," referring to an indefinite or general antecedent). Most (61%) are nominal clauses, serving as the subject or object of the main verb or some other substantival function. About one-fourth are adjectival. Typically they are introduced by a relative with  $\text{\ddot{a}ν}$  or  $\text{\acute{e}\acute{\alpha}ν}$  (124); the relative is

<sup>32</sup>Cf. my article, "Subjunctives," 6.

<sup>33</sup>Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; 13:2; Luke 8:17; 9:27; 18:30; Acts 13:41; Rom 4:8.

ὅς (101 times), ὅσος (12 times), or ὅστις (11 times). Once the indefinite relative ὅστις is used without ἄν (James 2:10), and once the simple relative is used with the indefinite pronoun τι as its antecedent (Heb 8:3). One indefinite relative clause is so compressed that it is difficult to analyze (Acts 21:16). All of the indefinite relative clauses use the subjunctive mood.

### Relative Adverbial Clauses of Time

This group of relative clauses has been discussed above and needs here only to be looked at with respect to the mood used. All of the other adverbial relative clauses and more than two-thirds of the relative temporal clauses use the indicative mood. But about one-third of the relative temporal clauses use the subjunctive. Relative temporal clauses follow the standard procedure for all temporal clauses. When the sense is “until” and the time “until which” is either future or unknown, then the subjunctive is used. In all other instances the indicative is used. So the subjunctive here is normal usage and fits the basic significance of the mood.

### Hortatory Subjunctive

The hortatory subjunctive is usually found in the main clause of a sentence, expressing a futuristic and potential character. In one instance it occurs in a relative clause with that same significance (Heb 12:28: ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι’ ἧς λατρεύομεν, “Let us be thankful and so worship [*NIV*]).<sup>34</sup>

### Future Indicative as Equivalent to Aorist Subjunctive?

In a previous study<sup>35</sup> the use of the future indicative in places where normally an aorist subjunctive would be expected has been considered. There are a few places where this may be true among the relative clauses. In Mark 8:35 and Acts 7:7 the simple relative with ἄν or ἔάν is followed by the future indicative. Both are indefinite relative clauses that normally use the subjunctive. In Matt 12:36 a clause with the future indicative is introduced by πᾶν . . . ὅ, which often is indefinite. If the future indicative is understood as subjunctive, the clause would be indefinite and the sense “whatever idle word men should speak.” This would fit the context well. But the particle ἄν is not present, and the sense could conceivably be definite, “every specific word which men shall speak.”

<sup>34</sup>BDF (p. 191, §377) translates the clause, “through which let us worship.” A freer translation is, “Let us take our grace and by it let us worship.”

<sup>35</sup>See my article, “Subjunctives,” 16-17.

In Luke 11:6 the relative is followed by a future indicative that, if understood to function like a subjunctive, could be an example of a deliberative question indirectly quoted in a relative clause. However, the simple future indicative seems more probable.

### *Imperative*

An imperative verb occurs after a relative in 9 instances, but in none of them does the relative have anything to do with the mood. A relative clause frequently introduces a new statement by attaching it subordinately to the preceding one (see the discussion above under "Adjectival Relative Clauses). The new statement may be imperatival, with an imperative verb. This use of the relative clause is parallel to the hortatory subjunctive with a relative. Six such examples are seen in the NT.<sup>36</sup>

Three other imperatives in relative clauses are to be explained otherwise. They are found in clauses involved with the alternating use of the relative. This alternating relative may put together sets of words, phrases, or clauses. In Jude 22–23 three imperatival clauses are put together in this manner: "have mercy on some [οὓς μὲν] . . . , save others [οὓς δέ] . . . , on some have mercy [οὓς δέ]."

### *Participle*

The alternating use of the relative also explains the two participles which follow relatives in Mark 12:5, "beating some, and killing others." The two participles are not verbs governed by the relative, but rather are two phrases put in an alternating relationship.

#### A FEW PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES

The purpose of language is to communicate, not to confuse, and usually it works very well. But when one word is used for another, such as a relative pronoun for an antecedent, there is introduced the potential for a misunderstanding. One of the surprising facts arising out of this study is the rarity of confusion over the identification of antecedents. Almost always the antecedent is quite obvious. However, there are a few instances in which this is not the case. I mention four.

### *Matthew 26:50*

When Jesus spoke to Judas in Gethsemane on the occasion of the betrayal, he said, ἔταῖρε, ἐφ' ὃ πάρει. Two very different understandings have developed out of these words. The problem centers in

<sup>36</sup>2 Tim 4:15; Titus 1:13; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 3:3; 5:9, 12.

the use of the relative. Traditional grammarians have tried to treat it as a normal relative pronoun; the phrase ἐφ' ὃ would mean "for which," and the clause would be translated, "Friend, for which you are here." This obviously is incomplete. Two solutions have become popular.

Traditional grammarians have usually supplied the need by inserting a verb at the beginning, not expressed but supplied mentally to make sense of the statement (cf. *NASB*: "Friend, do what you have come for"; most recent translations are similar). Grammatically it is proper, the sense is tolerable, but the question remains, why is the most important word in the statement left unsaid?

In very early times the words were understood quite differently; they were taken as a question, "Why are you here?" The Old Latin and Sinaitic Syriac understood it so, as did Luther's German and the *KJV*, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" There is no conjecture and the sense is more natural to the context. The problem is the pronoun; ὃ is a relative, not an interrogative. Grammarians, under the long-standing dominance of Attic Purists, insisted that the relative *never* was used as an interrogative.

Adolph Deissman<sup>37</sup> has shown that this was no longer true in later Greek. He quotes an inscription etched on the side of an ancient Syrian glass wine goblet (first century A.D.): ἐφ' ὃ πάρει; εὐφραίνου "Why are you here? Make merry!" Several other such glasses have been found, and papyrologists attest this interrogative use of the relative for later common Greek. Taking this understanding the sense becomes clear and forceful, "Friend, why are you here?"

## 2 Peter 1:4

The prepositional phrase, δι' ὧν, is found in 2 Peter 1:4. Since ὧν may be any gender, the only factor of agreement to be checked is number; it is plural. There are three possible antecedents in the context: ἡμῖν (v 3), πάντα (v 3), and δόξη καὶ ἀρετῇ (v 3). If ἡμῖν is the antecedent, then the sense of vv 3-4, is, "given to us . . . through whom (i.e., us) . . . he has given to us promises." This understanding of the passage is awkward and makes poor sense. When πάντα is considered to be the antecedent, the sense is, "given us all things . . . through which (things) he has given to us promises." This, too, is awkward. The last mentioned possible antecedent is the nearest of the three, and makes the best sense: "the One who called us by means of his own glory and virtue, through which he has given promises."

<sup>37</sup>Adolph Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper, 1922) 125-31.

## 2 Peter 3:6

This passage also uses the prepositional phrase, δι' ὧν. Two antecedents would fit well the meaning of the passage: the flood waters and the Word of God. But in both cases there are problems of agreement. Five explanations have been suggested. (1) The antecedent is τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (v 5); it is singular, but God's Word is made up of many words. (2) The antecedent is ὕδατι (v 5); the word is singular, but it used twice (ἐν ὕδατι καὶ ἐξ ὕδατι), and the nature of water is such that singular/plural is not so relevant. (3) ὕδατι plus λόγῳ; together they are plural. However, this is an unlikely combining of two disparate items. (4) The antecedent is οὐρανοὶ καὶ γῆ; a very unrealistic suggestion which does not give good sense to the passage. (5) Variant readings in the text (see NA<sup>26</sup>) suggest the possibility of copyist error. However, the evidence for this is weak. Of these five explanations I prefer the second.

## 1 John 3:20

This is a grammatically difficult passage. The problem centers in the fact that the word ὅτι occurs twice in the verse, and one of these seems to be superfluous. There are three basic ways of understanding this text.

One way to solve the grammatical difficulty of this passage is to say that the first ὅτι is not the subordinating conjunction, but the indefinite relative pronoun, ὅ τι. This explanation is plausible since, at the time of the writing of the NT, the continuous writing of words without spaces between them was the almost universal practice. Thus, there would be no written distinction between ὅτι and ὅ τι. Given this understanding, ἐάν is indefinite rather than conditional, and ὅ τι ἐάν means "whatever." This way of handling the passage has been taken almost universally by modern speech English translations (e.g., *ASV* margin, *RSV*, *Amplified Bible*, Philip's, *NEB* text and first margin, *NASB*, and *NIV*). However, for many reasons I am convinced that this understanding is wrong.

First, the case of ὅ τι (accusative) does not fit. *NASB* translates the clause, "in whatever our heart condemns us"; the case of the indefinite relative pronoun would depend on the verb καταγινώσκω. This verb takes a genitive object to express the fault with which one is being charged.<sup>38</sup> The accusative cannot be explained by assimilation, for the antecedent (unexpressed) would not be in the accusative case either.

<sup>38</sup>BAGD, 409.

Furthermore, if the opening of v 20 was the indefinite relative ὅτι, then the structure of 1 John 3:19–21 would not be consistent with the contrasting structure of opposite conditions so characteristic of this epistle (cf. 1:6–7, 8–9, 10; 2:4–6, 10–11, 15; 3:6, 7–8, 14–15, 17; 4:2–3, 4–6, 7–8, 10; 5:10). One of the ways in which this contrasting structure is introduced is with the phrase, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν, “in this we are getting to know.” The phrase is used nine times in this epistle with only slight verbal variations. Twice (2:5; 3:16) the phrase is followed by an indefinite conditional, “whoever.” Three times (3:24; 4:2; 5:2) it is followed by one side of a contrasting pair, the other side being implied. Three times (2:3; 4:2, 6) it is followed by contrasting, opposite, conditional sentences. 1 John 3:19–21 seems to fit into this last category: “if our heart condemns us [v 20] . . . if our heart does not condemn us [v 21].”

Finally, the interpretation of the passage that results from understanding the opening words to be the indefinite relative is out of character with the rest of this epistle. To paraphrase with an indefinite relative, the passage reads as follows:

We know that we are of the truth and shall persuade our conscience [the probable sense of καρδιά here] toward God with respect to anything our conscience may rebuke us for, because God knows us better than we know ourselves; he knows that our conscience is wrong in condemning us. If our conscience does *not* condemn us we already have this boldness toward him.

This interpretation suggests that man is more sensitive about his sin than God is. But 1 John was written to bring assurance of salvation to those who believe (2:3; 5:13). Assurance is gained when one examines his life on the basis of a series of tests that John presents to separate between believers and unbelievers. The evidence of God working in a life is seen when one becomes more loving and more Christ-like, living in purity rather than in sin. Given the interpretation that results from understanding John to have used an indefinite relative, 1 John 3:19–21 would be teaching the opposite of the rest of the epistle; in this one instance one would be told not to worry about his conscience, because God knows that he is better than he thinks he is.

The second basic way to understand this text is to interpret the first ὅτι as a conjunction introducing a nominal, conditional (because of ἕάν) clause that is the direct object of the verb πείσομεν; the second ὅτι is superfluous and should be ignored. The sense is, “We shall persuade our conscience before God that if our conscience condemns us, God is greater than our conscience.” The major problem with this understanding of the grammar is that nowhere in Greek, NT

or otherwise, does *πείθω* use a *ὅτι* clause as object. The normal construction uses an infinitive or *περί* or *ἵνα*. Also, it leaves the second *ὅτι* unexplained.

The third way to make sense of this passage is to say that the first *ὅτι* introduces a causal, conditional clause. The resultant meaning becomes an explanation of the confidence expressed in v 19: "We shall persuade our conscience before God because, if our conscience condemns us. . . ." Thus far the grammar is proper, and the sense is good. But there is still the problem of the second *ὅτι*. This is variously explained. Some ignore it or drop it. Alford<sup>39</sup> sees the clause as causal, and by supplying *ἐστίν* it becomes "it is because God is greater than our hearts." A. Plummer<sup>40</sup> makes it a nominal clause, with *δῆλον* to be supplied: "it is obvious that God is greater than our hearts." This makes excellent sense, and there is a possible parallel to the construction in 1 Tim 6:7, where there is a *ὅτι* clause and in the critical apparatus (NA<sup>26</sup>) the variant readings show *δῆλον ὅτι*. Two other examples, but without *ὅτι*, are 1 Cor 15:27 and Gal 3:11. Some variation of this third basic way of understanding the grammar seems to be the most defensible.

#### CONCLUSION

The use of relative pronouns and relative clauses in the Greek NT is rich and varied. This study has statistically analyzed the grammatical and semantic functions of relative pronouns and relative clauses. Generally, these functions are obvious, but the use of one word in the place of another (such as a relative pronoun in the place of its antecedent) does introduce the possibility of confusion.

<sup>39</sup>Henry Alford, *Greek Testament*, New ed. vol. 4 (London: Longmans Greek, and Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Company, 1894) 480.

<sup>40</sup>A. Plummer, *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, The Epistles of St. John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1896) 88.