

Conditional "IF" Clauses in Greek

First Class Condition (the condition of assumed reality)

- **Form:** "εἰ" (if) + Indicative (past, present, or future)
 - This is a frequent conditional clause, occurring about 300x in the NT
- **Meaning:** This condition assumes the truth of the premise. It's used when the speaker is either assuming the condition is true or presenting a fact.
 - The first class condition indicates *the assumption of truth for the sake of argument*. The normal idea, then, is *if—and let us assume that this is true for the sake of argument—then....*"
- **General Example:** "If this is true (and I'm **assuming** it is), then this will happen."
- **Specific Example:** "If you believe on Christ (and I'm **assuming** you really do), then you are saved"
 - Note: The person in reality may not believe on Christ, but the speaker **assumes** that he is a true believer. His assumption may be incorrect.
- **References:**
 - Matt 4:3; 5:29; **12:27-28**
 - Mark 4:23; 9:23
 - Luke 4:3; 11:11-13; 17:6
 - John 7:4; 10:37; 13:17 (both 1st & 3rd class); 14:7,15; 15:7; 16:23; 18:36
 - Rom **4:2**; 5:15; 6:5,8; 8:9,31; 8:17; 10:9; 11:22
 - 1 Cor 12:15,16; 15:12; **15:13,14,16,17,19**
 - 2 Cor 5:17
 - Gal 2:18; 4:7; **5:11,18**
 - Eph 3:2; 4:21
 - Col 1:23; 2:20; 3:1
 - 2 Tim 2:11,12,13
 - Heb 12:7-8
 - James 1:5; 2:8,9
 - 1 Peter 2:1,3
 - 1 John 3:13; 4:11; 5:9

- In the first class conditional sentence, the speaker or writer assumes the condition to be true. Whether it is actually true is another story! The condition (PROTASIS) is merely assumed to be true for the sake of argument. He may know that the condition is false, but he **assumes** that it is true for the sake of argument. Whether the PROTASIS is really true must be determined by the context and by common sense. Don't be deceived by the fact that the **indicative mood** (the mood of factual reality) is used in the PROTASIS. Most LIES are told in the indicative mood! Lies are stated as facts because the LIAR wants you to believe that his statement is true (compare Gen 3:4).
- Matt 12:27 is an example of a first class conditional sentence which must not be translated as "since." Jesus said, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Why would it be totally wrong to translate "if" as "since" in this verse?
- To prove an argument, a person skilled in logic will often take a statement which he knows to be false (but which his opponents believe is true) and he will assume that it is true in order to show the absurd and illogical conclusions that follow.

Note: **Bold** references above mean that it is incorrect to translate "if" as "since" in these verses. The following verses are examples where "since" makes sense: Rom 8:31; Gal 5:18; 1 Cor 15:2

Second Class Condition (contrary to fact)

- **Form:** "εἰ" (if) + Past Indicative
- **Meaning:** The second class condition indicates the assumption of an *untruth* (for the sake of argument). For this reason it is appropriately called the "contrary to fact" condition (or the *unreal* condition).
 - It might be better to call it *presumed* contrary to fact, however, since sometimes it presents a condition that is true, even though the speaker assumes it to be untrue (e.g., Luke 7:39)
- **General Example:** "If this would have been, then that would have followed."
- **Specific Example:** "If you had believed on Christ (but you didn't), then you would have been saved."
- **Other examples in English:** If I were you, I would not go. If you were older, you would understand. If this were Sunday, I would be at church.
- **Translation:** "If (only)..." or "If it had been the case that..."
- **References:**

- Matt 11:21,23; 12:7; 17:20
- Mark 13:20
- Luke 7:39
- John 5:46; 8:42; 9:41; 11:21; 15:19,22; 18:36
- Rom 4:14
- 1 Cor 2:8; 11:31
- Gal 1:10; 3:21
- Heb 8:4,7

Third Class Condition (condition of assumed probability)

- **Form:** "εἰ" (if) + subjunctive
- **Meaning:** The third class condition often presents the condition as *uncertain of fulfillment, but still likely*. There are, however, many exceptions to this...The *third* class condition encompasses a broad range of potentialities in Koine Greek. It depicts what is *likely to occur* in the *future*, what could *possibly occur*, or even what is only *hypothetical* and will not occur.
- **General Example:** "If at any future time this condition is met, then this will follow."
- **Specific Example:** "If you should believe on Christ (and I hope you will), then you will be saved."
- **Translation:** "If... might (possibly)..."
- **References:**
 - Matt 4:9; 5:13,29; 6:15,22-23; 9:21; 10:13; 16:24; 26:39
 - Mark 5:28
 - Luke 19:42
 - John 3:3; 7:17; 8:31; 10:9; 11:9; 13:17 (both 1st & 3rd class); 14:3,15
 - Acts 8:31
 - Rom 7:2; 8:13; 10:9
 - 1 Cor 3:14; 13:1,2; 15:2
 - Gal 1:8 ("though" = "if"); 6:1
 - Col 1:23
 - 2 Tim 2:5
 - Titus 2:5

- Heb 3:14; 6:3; 10:38
- James 4:15
- 1 John 1:6--2:1
- Rev 3:20; 22:18-19
- The third class conditional sentence states what results will happen if at any time in the future the condition is met. The writer or speaker knows that at the present time the condition has not been fulfilled, but it is possible and even **probable** that the condition will be met at some time in the future. There is hope that the condition will be fulfilled, but on the other hand, there is some uncertainty or doubt in the writer's mind as to whether the condition will be met. It may be fulfilled, or it may not be fulfilled. Consider 1 John 1:9. If at any time in the future (the sooner the better) the believer confesses his sins, then God will forgive and cleanse! Hopefully, the believer will confess his sins, but there is also the possibility that he will fail to do this. But the moment he confesses, God will forgive and cleanse.

Fourth Class Condition (condition of assumed possibility)

- **Form:** "εἰ" (if) + Optative (rare in the New Testament).
- **Meaning:** The fourth class condition indicates a *possible* condition in the future, usually a remote possibility...there are no complete fourth class conditions in the NT.
- **Translation:** "If it were possible..."
- **References:**
 - Luke 1:62; 22:42
 - John 4:10; 11:21
 - Acts 17:18; 26:8
 - 1 Peter 3:14,17
- The fourth class condition is even less probable than the third class condition. Whereas the fulfillment of a third class condition is PROBABLE, the fulfillment of a fourth class condition is merely POSSIBLE. There are no complete examples of a fourth class conditional sentence in the NT. For a partial example, see 1 Peter 3:14.

The list of references above is not all-encompassing for the entire NT. Here is a quick cheat sheet to almost always accurately identify the condition of an "if" statement:
When you see "if":

- Do you see εαν (*ean*)? Yes = 3rd class.
- If not, do you see ει (*ei*)? If yes, then look for αν.
- Is there an αν after the ει (*ei*)? Yes = 2nd class; No = 1st class.

You can easily look up the "ifs" of the Greek NT by consulting a concordance of the Greek New Testament and looking up "ει", "εαν", the two words translated "if," plus the particle "αν", which also indicates a conditional clause. In Englishman's Greek Concordance...

εαν starts on p170 (https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wigram/greekcon.i.html#i-Page_170)

ει starts on p183 (https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wigram/greekcon.i.html#i-Page_183).

αν starts on p37 (https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wigram/greekcon.i.html#i-Page_37).

In all of these, the English is from the KJV or Authorized Version as it is sometimes called.

The αν verses don't use the word "if," but the concept is there.

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