

Greek Conditional Sentences

Conditional sentences are "If ..., then ..." statements. They make a statement that if something happens, then something else will happen. The 'if' clause is referred to as the '**protasis**' by grammarians. It comes from the Greek words '**pro**' (meaning before) and '**stasis**' (meaning 'stand'). So the 'protasis' means 'what stands before' or '**comes first**' as far as these two clauses are concerned. The 'then' clause is termed the '**apodosis**'; it is what 'comes after' the protasis. The Apodosis is the *main* clause and the Protasis the *dependent* clause.

Logical Relationship between Protasis and Apodosis

There are a number of different relationships that can exist between the protasis and apodosis. It is important that you try to distinguish between these relationships for sake of more clearly understanding the text. Please also note that there can be some overlap between these three relationships.

1. They could represent a **Cause-Effect relationship**, where the action in the protasis will cause the effect in the apodosis. For example: Romans 8:13b, "...but if by the spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live." *Strictly cause and effect, no inference of truth or falseness.*
2. They could show an **Evidence-Inference type relationship**, where the apodosis is inferred to be true based upon the evidence presented in the protasis. This will often be semantically the converse of the 'Cause-Effect' relationship. For example: 1 Cor. 15:44, "If there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual one."
3. Or, the relationship could be one showing **Equivalence between the protasis and apodosis**, which is actually a subset of the Evidence-Inference relationship. For example: Gal. 2:18, "...if I build up again those things which I destroyed, I prove myself a transgressor."

Classification of Greek Conditional Sentences

Greek has more ability than English in describing the kind of relationship between the protasis, and the apodosis. It is possible for the writer/speaker to indicate whether the protasis is true or not. Actually, they can indicate if they are presenting the protasis as 'assumed true (or false) for the sake of argument'. In order to indicate this kind of relationship between the protasis and apodosis, Classical Greek traditional had four kinds of conditional sentences, based upon what tense and mood the verb occurs in and upon some helping words. These are much the same in Koine (Biblical) Greek, with slight variations.

→ **First Class Condition**—Is considered the '**Simple Condition**' and assumes that the premise (protasis) is true for the sake of argument. The protasis is formed with the helping word *ei* ('if') with the main verb in the **indicative mood**, in any **tense**; with any mood and tense in the apodosis.

→ **Second Class Condition**—Is known as the '**Contrary-to-Fact Condition**' and assumes the premise as false for the sake of argument. The protasis is again formed with the helping word *ei* ('if') and the main verb in the indicative mood. The tense of the verb (in the protasis) must also be in a past-time tense (**ao** or **imperfect**). The apodosis will usually have the **particle** *an* as a marking word, showing some contingency.

Third Class Condition—Traditionally known as the 'More Probable Future Condition', the third class condition should actually be split into two different categories, the '**Future More Probable Condition**' (indicating either a probable future action or a hypothetical situation) and the '**Present General Condition**' (indicating a generic situation or universal truth at the present time). It is formed in the protasis using the word *ean* (*ei* plus *an* = 'if') and a verb in the **subjunctive mood**. The main verb of the protasis can be in any tense, but if the condition is a 'Present General', the verb must be in the **present tense**.

Fourth Class Condition—Is usually called the '**Less Probable Future Condition**' and does not have a complete example in the New Testament. The fulfillment of this condition was considered even more remote than the Third Class Condition. It was formed with the helping word *ei* and the **optative mood** in the protasis. The apodosis had the helping word *an* and its verb was also in the optative mood.