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**ἘÁN with a Verb in the Subjunctive Mood  
in Conditional Clauses in the Greek NT**

## ἘΑΝ with a Verb in the Subjunctive Mood in Conditional Clauses in the Greek NT

It is generally accepted that the study of the grammar of a “dead” language (i.e. a language that is no longer used for the purpose of communication) depends on description rather than prescription. The only “experts” that can be consulted for help are those who actually wrote in the language and this only by considering what the authors themselves have left. All that can be known about their language is what can be learned from the examination of what remains of their ancient writings. As James L. Boyer noted,

The meaning of words is properly determined by a study of the ways they are used in their many contexts, not by theoretical rationalizations on root meanings and etymologies. In just the same way the significance of a group of words in grammatical construction is determined by careful study of the same construction in actually occurring contexts, not by rationalizing about voice, mood, and the technical terminology employed by grammarians to identify them.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly then, there would be two main steps to the method that would allow a language to be adequately described. First, some occurrences of the item (whether a word, a grammatical construction, etc.) should be *inductively* examined in order to develop a theory that might be able to explain how it was used. Second, other occurrences of the item should be *deductively* studied by systematically applying the theory to them in order to see if the theory could correctly explain how the item was used in each additional occurrence. If the theory does not seem to work for every additional occurrence tested then the theory should either be modified and then re-tested or thrown out altogether in favor of a new theory. During the deductive step it would be crucial that the testing include a large enough sample of occurrences in order to be as accurate as possible. If the sample were not large enough then just about any theory could be “proved.” Obviously, the best sample size would contain all available occurrences. Collecting all of the occurrences of a particular word in the NT is a relatively simple task compared to collecting all (or even most) of the occurrences of a particular grammatical construction which, until now was *very* tedious. It is now possible to obtain a listing of all of the occurrences of a particular grammatical construction by using a computerized grammatical concordance (in this case GramCord<sup>®</sup>). This not only makes step two easier and faster, it also provides the possibility of thoroughly testing a proposed theory by allowing it to be verified against every occurrences. The goal of this paper is to examine some of the proposed theories with regard to the significance of ἔάν with a verb in the subjunctive mood in conditional clauses in the Greek NT against the complete list of occurrences of the construction provided by GramCord<sup>®</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> James L. Boyer, *First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?*, Grace Theological Journal, volume 2 (1981), p. 75.

The current version of GramCord<sup>®</sup>'s data base has 267 occurrences of ἐάν tagged as subordinating conditional conjunctions. 66 others are tagged as modal particles. These classifications, of course, are *functional* categories into which each occurrence was classified after being examined by those responsible for creating and maintaining the data base. The GramCord<sup>®</sup> manual states that, "In most cases such judgment [between the functional categories of particles and conjunctions] is so readily discernible from the context that there is little or no disagreement." The distinction made between "particles" and "conjunctions" was made on the understanding that "particles are 'color-words' functioning within a clause; conjunctions are connectives relating clauses, phrases, or words." Yet it was also admitted that, "Sometimes, however, there are ambiguities and differences of judgment." Provision was therefore made in the data base for handling possible disagreements: "In a few cases where known differences of opinion seemed significant, optional identifications have been incorporated."<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that no "differences of opinion" were revealed in the GramCord<sup>®</sup> output compiled for this paper. With this preliminary work of determining whether ἐάν was used in relative and temporal clauses (i.e. used as a particle) or conditional clauses (i.e. used as a conjunction) already done, it was decided to trust these classifications unless they proved inadequate.

The use of GramCord<sup>®</sup> also led to the discovery that there are 104 present subjunctive verbs and 197 aorist subjunctive verbs used with ἐάν in the protasis of conditional clauses (less than 2:1 in favor of the aorist tense). (Obviously, there are instances where more than one verb occurs with one ἐάν. There are also instances where a present tense verb occurs together with an aorist tense verb.) Of the 267 conditional clauses, 94 have the first verb in the present tense while 166 have the first verb in the aorist tense (less than 2:1 in favor of the aorist tense). (ἐάν also occurs four times with the perfect subjunctive and indicative [of οἶδα], twice with the future indicative, and once in the case of an implied verb [Galatians 2:16]). Of the 13 occurrences of καὶ (καί + ἐάν) nine are with aorist subjunctives and four are with present subjunctives. What then, is the significance of ἐάν with a verb in the subjunctive mood in a conditional clause?

Before that question is answered one must consider a more basic question: What is the significance of the subjunctive mood? Steve Kempf rightly noted that "a direct connection exists between how grammarians have classified conditional sentences and their view of how moods and tenses have originated."<sup>3</sup> Their origins, however, are only important insofar as they reveal how the moods and tenses were understood by the original users. The significance of the subjunctive mood will therefore be examined as various theories about conditional clauses are presented.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Miller, *GRAMCORD USER'S GUIDE*, (1984), p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Kempf, *Conditional Sentences in the Lukan Writings: A Study in Form and Meaning*, Thesis for the MA in NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, (1977), p. 1.

Typically, NT Greek grammarians have followed Classical Greek grammarians concerning theories of the origin and meaning of the Greek tenses and moods. However, there has been disagreement even among the Classical grammarians. For example, W. W. Goodwin proposed a theory that the subjunctive was originally and essentially a form for expressing future time and that the optative was simply a weaker subjunctive. Goodwin wrote,

The subjunctive, in its simplest and apparently most primitive use, expresses simple futurity... In conditional...sentences it expresses a future supposition; except in *general* conditions, where it is indefinite (but never strictly present) [not to mention past] in its time [reference].<sup>4</sup>

Even though he states that “the classification of conditional sentences is based partly on the time to which the supposition refers, partly on what is implied with regard to the fulfillment of the condition, and partly on the distinction between particular and general suppositions”<sup>5</sup> he goes on to classify conditionals into four groups: 1) Present and past suppositions implying nothing as to the truth or untruth of the protasis, 2) Present and past suppositions implying that the protasis is not true and that the condition is not fulfilled, 3) Future suppositions in more vivid form (into which he puts the occurrences of ἐάν with the subjunctive and εἰ with the future indicative), and 4) Future suppositions in less vivid form (into which he puts εἰ or ἄν with the optative).<sup>6</sup> These groups seem to be based totally on time as it is associated with the form of the verb.

A. T. Robertson tells us that another Classical grammarian, B. L. Gildersleeve, also divided conditional sentences into four types but with each being further divided into two groups.<sup>7</sup> The two groups are called *determined* (i.e. the premise or condition is assumed to be either true or untrue) and *undetermined* (i.e. the condition is not assumed to be either true or untrue).<sup>8</sup> According to Gildersleeve,<sup>9</sup> the four types of conditional sentences are: 1) Logical (a statement of fact), 2) Anticipatory or Legal, 3) Ideal, and 4) Unreal.<sup>10</sup> He also divides the Anticipatory condition into those which are *particular* and those which are *generic* depending upon the character of the apodosis.<sup>11</sup> He differed from Goodwin, however, in that he did not believe that time should be used as one of the main factors in classifying conditional sentences. In spite of his cautiousness about time, Gildersleeve still associated the subjunctive

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<sup>4</sup> W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, revised by C. B. Gulick, (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1930), p. 279.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), p. 1004.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1005.

<sup>9</sup> It must be noted that the present writer is indebted to the work of Steve Kempf for the following material concerning the views of B. L. Gildersleeve.

<sup>10</sup> B. L. Gildersleeve, *Studies in Pindaric Syntax II; On AN and KEN in Pindar*, *AJP* 3 (1882):446-449, cited by Kempf, *Conditional Sentences*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Kempf, *Conditional Sentences*, p. 20.

mood with future time. Kempf quotes him as viewing ἐάν with the subjunctive as expressing greater temporal exactness over εἰ with the future indicative.<sup>12</sup>

The importance of Gildersleeve to the present discussion can be seen from his influence upon the NT Greek grammarian, A. T. Robertson. Robertson adapted Gildersleeve's determined/undetermined approach to develop his own four-class system: 1) Determined as Fulfilled, 2) Determined as Unfulfilled, 3) Undetermined with Prospect of Determination, and 4) Remote Prospect of Determination.<sup>13</sup> Notice that the determined/undetermined distinction has become part of the main criteria for classification for him. In Classes 1 and 2 the indicative is used while in Classes 3 and 4 (because of the element of uncertainty) the subjunctive and the optative (respectively) are used. The significance of the subjunctive is that it indicates a "doubtful, hesitating affirmation."<sup>14</sup> Because the premise is not assumed to be either true or untrue, the subjunctive indicates *probability* while the optative indicates *possibility*.<sup>15</sup> (Other grammarians have since referred to this distinction as *objective possibility* versus *subjective possibility*.) Robertson writes, "...the subjunctive mode brings the expectation within the horizon of a lively hope in spite of the cloud of hovering doubt."<sup>16</sup> Apparently not being content with the distinctions he has made up to this point, Robertson adds the element of time reference to his classifications: "...the 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition is confined to the future (from the standpoint of the speaker or writer). The 1<sup>st</sup> class condition covers past, present and future."<sup>17</sup> This conclusion seems to be based on the invalid assumption that if something is not being asserted as being either true or untrue then it is contingent upon something that has not yet taken place and, therefore, necessarily refers to something in the future.

A good illustration of Robertson's theory can be seen as it is applied to John 13:17. Jesus has just washed the feet of his disciples and taught them that they are to serve one another as he has served them. John 13:17 says, "If you know [εἰ with the indicative] these things, blessed are you if you do [ἐάν with the present subjunctive] them." Robertson says, "Jesus assumes the knowledge as a fact [εἰ with the indicative], but the performance is doubtful [ἐάν with the present subjunctive]."<sup>18</sup> Obviously, their performance will be based on what they do in the future. It can be seen that both Robertson's determined/undetermined distinction as well as his ideas about time reference hold true in his example. But what about other instances?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 1005-1027.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 1004.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 1005.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1016.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 1018.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 1019.

There are, in fact, many instances where ἐάν occurring with both present and aorist subjunctives in the protasis of conditional clauses refer to future time. In Luke 10 Jesus gives the 70 “others” instructions about being sent out to minister ahead of him. Verse 6 (parallel Matthew 10:13) says, “And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him.” “Is” is a present subjunctive that refers to the future time when the 70 will be entering into the homes of people in other cities. An example with an aorist subjunctive referring to the future can be found in Revelation 22:18-19. John is finishing his letter and closes with these warnings concerning the words of the prophecy. He wrote,

If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city...

John was warning anyone who might think to tamper with the words he had just finished writing and therefore could not be referring to anything other than something in the future.

Many more examples could be cited which indicate a future time reference for the protasis,<sup>19</sup> yet there are other examples which indicate references to time other than specifically future time. For instance, Matthew 8:2 (parallel Mark 1:40, Luke 5:12) has ἐάν with the verb in the present subjunctive that refers to present time (as seen from the perspective of the speaker). A leper is seeking healing from Jesus. He addressed Jesus saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” It would be too forced to say that the leper was thinking of a future time (even if it were only a minute away) in which Jesus might be willing to cleanse him. It is better to understand the leper as saying, “If you are willing right now, I know that you could make me clean right now.” Perhaps an even clearer illustration of a reference to present time can be found in I Corinthians 6:4 (again with a verb in the present subjunctive). In this passage Paul is dealing with grievances among Christians. He writes, “If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church?” Because of the context there is no other way to take this verse except that there were some in the church in Corinth who currently (and possibly some in the past as well) had cases pending before secular courts. Whatever can be said, Paul certainly was not rebuking them for something in the future that had not happened yet!<sup>20</sup>

There are also instances where an aorist subjunctive refers to present time (from the perspective of the writer or speaker). In I Corinthians 7 Paul is dealing with marriage when he writes in verses 10-11,

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<sup>19</sup> Present subjunctive: Matthew 5:23, 21:3, 26:35, Mark 14:31, Luke 13:3,5, 19:31, John 16:62, I Corinthians 16:4, Galatians 5:2, I Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 13:23; aorist subjunctive: Matthew 4:9, 9:21, 21:24,25,26, 24:23,26, 26:42, 28:14, Mark 5:28, 8:3, 11:31, 13:21, Luke 4:7, 12:38, 13:9, 16:30,31, 20:5,6, John 16:51,53, 8:24, 9:22, 11:48,57, 12:32, 13:8, 14:3,14, 16:7, 19:12, 20:25, Acts 9:2, Romans 15:24, I Corinthians 4:19, 7:28, 10:28, 12:15,16, 13:3, 14:6, 16:7,10, II Corinthians 9:4, 13:2, Colossians 4:10, II Thessalonians 2:3, I John 5:16, III John 10.

<sup>20</sup> Other references to present time with the present subjunctive: John 3:2, 8:14, 10:38, Acts 5:38, James 5:15.

To those who are married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she is separated, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

It seems possible to understand the aorist subjunctive as referring either to the woman's current state or something which has happened to her in the past. It does not, however, seem possible to understand her separation as something that might happen in the future because that would be a clear violation of the command from the Lord that Paul just finished conveying! Another instance of a possible *past* referring protasis with  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  and a verb in the aorist subjunctive is Mark 7:11. In this passage Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the scribes for "leaving the commandment of God but holding fast to the tradition of men." The example that he uses to prove this fact involves a violation of the commandment "Honor your father and your mother." In verses 11-13 he accuses them by saying,

If a man says to his father or his mother, 'What you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God), then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do."

The last line is an indication that, although they probably were not doing so at the exact moment that Jesus was speaking, yet the Pharisees and scribes were in the habit of not allowing someone to help his parents once he had declared what he owned to be dedicated to the Lord. This reference, then, is actually past if not present referring.

Apart from present and past referring instances of  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  with verbs in the subjunctive mood in the protasis of conditional clauses there are also instances of timeless and omnitemporal time references. John 11:9b-10a records Jesus as saying, "If any one walks [present subjunctive] in the day, he does not stumble... But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles..." Clearly, these statements *could* apply to the future but they need not be confined to it. In fact, these statements hold true for all time references (i.e. past, present, as well as future). Statements like these are known as *gnomic* expressions. Another example of a present subjunctive can be found in James 2:17: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." This statement is also true for all time references and cannot be limited to just the future.

Instances involving the aorist tense can also be found. In Romans 14 Paul argues that "it is wrong to do anything that makes your brother stumble." Verse 23 says, "But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." This verse also requires no reference to a particular time in order for it to be true. No doubt there had been those who had done it already (as of Paul's writing) and there would be those who would probably do it in the future. Many more examples could be cited if it were necessary.<sup>21</sup> It can easily be seen that to insist that

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<sup>21</sup> Present subjunctive: Matthew 6:22-23, 15:14, Luke 6:33, John 13:27, 5:19,31, 6:65, 7:17, 9:31, 21:25, Romans 2:25,26, 13:4, 14:8, I Corinthians 11:14,15, 13:1,2, 14:14,16,24,28, Galatians 1:8, I Timothy 1:8, II Timothy 2:5,

the subjunctive in the protasis of a conditional clause necessarily refers to future time is to overlook the many instances where it simply does not.

It is clear that the claim of Robertson (and others) that *ἐάν* with a verb in the subjunctive mood in the protasis of a conditional clause always refers to future time is wrong. It does seem, however, that the determine/undetermined distinction holds true in all cases (this conclusion will be examined further). This shows that just because there is no assertion being made as to whether the protasis is true or not (i.e. when the mood is subjunctive) does not mean that it necessarily refers to future time.

Also, *probability* as wrapped up in the meaning of the subjunctive does not hold up either. Instances like John 11:25 (“If he should die, yet shall he live.”) where the protasis is *certain*<sup>22</sup> as well as instances like John 8:55 (Jesus is speaking: “If I said, I do not know him [the Father], I would be a liar.”) where the protasis is *impossible* or *improbable*<sup>23</sup> both combine to destroy that part of his theory.

Another NT Greek grammarian, E. De W. Burton, by his own admission follows the classification of conditional sentences of Goodwin<sup>24</sup> in his emphasis on the importance of time as associated with moods and tenses. His six classes are: 1) Simple Present or Past Particular Suppositions, 2) Supposition contrary to Fact, 3) Future Supposition with more Probability (“The protasis states a supposition which refers to the future, suggesting some probability of its fulfillment.” Usually expressed by *ἐάν* with a subjunctive in the protasis and the future indicative in the apodosis), 4) Future Supposition with Less Probability (*εἰ* with the optative), 5) Present General Supposition (expressed by *ἐάν* with the subjunctive in the protasis and the present indicative in the apodosis), and 6) Past General Supposition (no instance in the NT).<sup>25</sup> All of the verses that he sights as examples<sup>26</sup> for class 6 (Present General Supposition) (including John 11:9 which was specifically discussed above) are timeless or omnitemporal and *not* present referring. Also, class 3 (Future Supposition with more Probability) does not hold up in all instances of *ἐάν* with the subjunctive in the protasis and the future indicative in the apodosis. Even in Matthew there are at least three instances that are clearly timeless and not future referring thus proving Burton wrong at this point as

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James 2:14,15,16, I John 1:7,9, 2:15, I John 3:20,21, 5:14; aorist subjunctive: Matthew 6:14,15, 12:11, 12:29, 16:26, 18:12,13, 22:24, Mark 13:24,25,27, 7:3,4, 9:50, 10:12, 12:19, Luke 6:34, 12:45, 14:34, 15:8, 20:28, John 3:3,5, 6:44, 7:51, 8:54, 11:40, 12:24,47, Acts 15:1, I Corinthians 7:39,40, 8:8,10, 14:7-9, 15:36, Ephesians 6:8, II Timothy 2:5, I Peter 3:13, I John 1:6,8,10, 2:1, 4:20, 5:16, Revelation 3:20.

<sup>22</sup> Other are: aorist subjunctive: Matthew 5:46, 12:29, John 12:24,32, 14:3, 16:7b, II Corinthians 5:1(?), II Corinthians 12:6(?), I John 12:28, 3:2, present subjunctive: Romans 9:27, I Corinthians 9:16, 14:14.

<sup>23</sup> Others are: present subjunctive: Matthew 15:14, 9:43,45,47(?), John 13:27, 5:19, 21:25, I Corinthians 4:15, 13:2; aorist subjunctive: Matthew 15:13(?), Mark 7:3,4, 8:3, 9:50(?), Luke 14:34(?), John 16:7a, I Corinthians 9:16, 12:15,16, 13:3, 14:6, 15:36, II Thessalonians 2:3.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1893), p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-109.

<sup>26</sup> II Timothy 2:5, Mark 3:24, John 7:51, 12:24, I Corinthians 7:39,40.

well. For example, in Matthew 12:11 Jesus responds to those who questioned him about healing on the sabbath: “What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls [aorist subjunctive] into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold [future indicative] of it and lift [future indicative] it out?” Matthew 16:26 and 22:24 are two other clear examples. It seems that both Goodwin and Burton are wrong in theorizing that the classification of conditional clauses by time reference needs to be related to verb tenses and moods.

Basing their classification according to form, F. Blass and A. Debrunner find five classes of conditional clauses in classical Greek four of which survive in NT Greek: 1)  $\epsilon\iota$  with the indicative expressing emphasis on the reality of the assumption (not of what is being assumed), 2)  $\epsilon\iota$  with the optative (barely represented in the NT), 3)  $\epsilon\iota$  with an augmented tense of the indicative marks the assumption as contrary to fact, and 4)  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  with the subjunctive (case of expectation).<sup>27</sup> About  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  with the subjunctive they write,

...with the present subjunctive [it] refers to the future... The aorist subjunctive appears in the great majority of cases, both in general conditions and in those referring to something impending, and occasionally also in those referring to something which was impending in past time.<sup>28</sup>

Enough has already been said with regard to the fact that the present subjunctive *can* (and frequently does) refer to times other than the future (see above on page 5ff). It appears that the statements about the aorist subjunctive admit that it can be used for timeless/omnitemporal references (general conditions), future references (referring to something impending), and past references (referring to something which was impending in past time). This is in agreement with what has been found to be true about the conditional clauses so far: the forms of the verbs cannot be used to determine whatever time reference was intended by the author or speaker.

Another NT Greek grammarian, C. F. D. Moule, finds three classes of conditional clauses: 1) Past or present conditions, possible or actual ( $\epsilon\iota$  with the indicative), 2) Recurrent or future conditions, whether real or hypothetical ( $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  with the subjunctive), and 3) Past or present conditions, only hypothetical ( $\epsilon\iota$  with a past tense of the indicative).<sup>29</sup> He informs his readers that

the form of a conditional sentence is largely determined by two main factors — *time* (past, present, future) or *Aktionsart* (instantaneous, protracted, recurrent, etc.) and the *degree of reality* (impossible, improbable, possible, probable, actual).<sup>30</sup>

In so far as references to time are associated here with tense and mood it has already been shown that this approach does not yield consistent results. Also, it has been shown (see above on page 7) that “degree of

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<sup>27</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner translated by R W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 188.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>29</sup> C. D. F. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, second edition, (Cambridge: University Press, 1952), pp. 148-149.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

reality” does not hold up as a valid criterion for classification. Indeed, Moule himself recognizes the problems inherent in his own system: “The difficulty of classifying is illustrated by sentences which belong by *meaning* in one class, but by *form* in another.”<sup>31</sup> With regard to this he cites II Timothy 2:12 and I Corinthians 14:16. He apparently sees a past or present reference to time here: “If you bless with the spirit, how can any one in the position of an outsider say the ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?” He is probably right as Paul was addressing problems which the church in Corinth *was* experiencing with regard to speaking in tongues. However, there are perhaps even clearer instances of his class 2 conditional which indicate past or present time references as was shown above (see above on page 5f).

Yet another NT Greek grammarian, Nigel Turner, finds four main kinds of conditional clauses: 1) Εἰ with the indicative representing the simple assumption, 2) εἰ with the optative representing the “potential” conception, 3) εἰ with the aorist or imperfect indicative representing an assumption as not corresponding with reality, and 4) εἰάν with subjunctive, indicating an expected result based on the present general or particular circumstances.<sup>32</sup> He writes,

...the aor. subj. denotes a single event taking place in the future, and the pres. subj. a general or iterative occurrence which may or may not be expected to take place at any time. [It] denotes a hypothesis which can occur over and over again (present *Aktionsart*).<sup>33</sup>

Like so many others, Turner wrongly relates the tense and mood to reference to time (see above discussions especially concerning Robertson). Recognizing a difficulty with his own system he cites Acts 5:38 where he says that “Gamaliel seems strangely biased.” He writes,

He says doubtfully *If it should be of men* (εἰάν ᾗ) but confidently *If (as it seems) it is of God* (εἰ ... ἐστίν), the one hypothetical, the other ‘real’. Luke has composed the speech and is giving his own conviction, not Gamaliel’s.<sup>34</sup>

Here again seems to be the mistaken assumption that *probability* is bound up in the subjunctive mood (see above on page 7). Another problem occurs when trying to find a particular *Aktionsart* in all occurrences of the same tense. In the case of the aorist, for example, it is certainly possible to find instances where the action being referred to is to be understood as a single event (Matthew 9:21 - “If only I might touch his garment...”; 22:24 - “If any man dies...”). There are, however, abundant instances where that understanding is simply not possible. Matthew 5:20 says, “If your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees...” Jesus is not saying that one’s righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees only once but continually. Mark 7:3 says, “If the Pharisees and the Jews do not wash their

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>32</sup> J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Volume 3, Syntax*, by Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 319.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

hands...” This does not refer to a single event but rather an iterative action they perform before every meal. It should be plain that neither time, Aktionsart, nor reality as they are associated with verb forms can be valid criteria for classifying conditional clauses.

The last NT Greek grammarian to be looked at here, V. M. Zerwick, divides conditional sentences into five classes: 1) the simple or *real* condition (the concrete case), 2) *unreal* 3) *eventual* or *probable* of the future, 4) *possible*, and 5) general or *universal*.<sup>35</sup> He writes,

The [**real**] condition and its consequence are simply stated without reference to whether the condition is in fact fulfilled or not: εἰ with the indicative... [the protasis] is taken as a basis of argument...; [In the **unreal** condition] the protasis represents the condition as not in fact realized: [εἰ with] aorist, imperfect, or pluperfect, according to the aspect desired and quite independently of the time referred to...; [The] **Eventual** conditions of the future: a future eventuality... ([though] it may quite properly be used of an eventuality regarded as highly unlikely to arise) is expressed by ἐάν with the subjunctive in the protasis... This type of condition is not really distinct from the [universal condition]...; [The] **possible** condition... is expressed by a protasis with the optative... There is no complete example of this in the NT...; [The] **general (universal)** condition in the (atemporal) present...uses ἐάν with the subjunctive in the protasis, and any form of general expression (commonly though not necessarily the present indicative) in the apodosis... The distinction between [classes 3 and 5]... is not a linguistic or grammatical one, but a purely extrinsic one based on the subject matter.<sup>36</sup>

Zerwick’s classification has much to commend it. He has apparently recognized many of the problems that other grammarians have had with their categories because he is very careful to spell out exactly what he means. Still, there are a few problems left that need to be pointed out. First, if the *real* condition is the only one that is “allowed” to express a “concrete case” then one would not expect to find any conditions with ἐάν and a subjunctive in the protasis that refer to something concrete yet not refer to the future (since a future reference would indicate an *eventual* condition). However, there are a limited number of instances in the NT that actually defy this expectation. John 3:2 contains a past referring present subjunctive that concretely refers to both God and Jesus. The verse says, “...for no one could do these signs that you do, if God were not with him.” Another example can be found in I Corinthians 9:16 which says, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no reason to boast.” This is not limited to future time and in fact is best understood as past referring because Paul is talking about things that he has done in the past in order to preach the gospel. It does not seem that concreteness based on verbal form should be made a criteria for classification of conditional clauses. A second problem of Zerwick’s classification can be seen in his definition of the *eventual* or *probable* condition. He says that it expresses a future eventuality. He further says that this eventuality may even refer to something that is “highly unlikely to arise.” However, this definition is not consistent with something that might be described as *probable*. How can an event which is “highly unlikely to arise” be considered *probable*? Therefore, if there is no degree of eventuality

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<sup>35</sup> M. V. Zerwick S. J., *Biblical Greek*, (Rome: 1963), p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-111.

being ascribed to this construction it is reduced to simply being future referring. As was shown above (see above on page 5ff) this is not a valid category because it ignores past and present referring protasis that do not fit into any other class. A third problem for Zerwick is the inconsistency seen in the *real* and *unreal* conditions as compared to the *eventual* condition. The *real* and *unreal* conditions are defined as being independent of any necessary time reference while the *eventual* condition is fundamentally related to future time. A fourth problem involves the fact that the *eventual* and *general* or *universal* conditions are not distinguished by form but by time reference (i.e. future versus atemporal [timeless]). This last point suggests that there might be something other than the form which indicates the desired time reference and that something more basic should be sought with respect to the significance of ἐάν with the subjunctive in conditional clauses.

Much of this paper has served to show the inadequacy of some of the major Greek grammars in explaining the significance of the different forms of the conditional clause in the NT. One of the main problems of traditional theories has been the misunderstanding of the relationship between the form of the verb (tense and mood) and a supposed inherent reference to time. This misunderstanding was seen to affect all of the grammarians reviewed here to one degree or another. In fact, this misunderstanding goes back at least as far as the Classical grammarians upon which some (if not all) of the NT grammarians are dependent. Therefore, in looking for a new theory that may be better able to understand conditional clauses, an approach should be sought that does not ascribe any inherent reference to time and/or kind of action (aktionsart - punctiliar, durative, etc.) to either the tense or mood (or combination) of the verb. This criteria is one of the strengths of *Aspect Theory*<sup>37</sup> with its approach to the Greek verbal system.

In *Aspect Theory* the form of the verb is seen to have been the *reasoned subjective choice* of the author or speaker in order to depict an event from a particular perspective. The mood of the verb reveals the author's *attitude* (i.e. the indicative expresses the author's assertion of the factuality of the event [whether it is factual in reality or not] while the subjunctive expresses the author's desire to *project* or visualize something [as if drawing a mental picture]). The aorist tense reveals the author's desire to present the action as a whole (i.e. not the completed action but the complete action). The present tense reveals the author's desire to portray the action as in process or unfolding. Any reference to time is provided by deictic indicators (i.e. context, adverbs, time words, etc.) in the passage. Interestingly, some of the grammarians have made isolated statements that support *Aspect Theory* even if they do not apply them consistently. Zerwick said, "...the choice of a *tense* whether in protasis or in apodosis depends entirely on the aspect and not on the time referred to..."<sup>38</sup> Burton wrote, "The most constant characteristic

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<sup>37</sup> As presented by Dr. Carson in class.

<sup>38</sup> Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, p. 107.

of the Present Indicative is that it denotes action in progress. It probably had originally no reference to present time.”<sup>39</sup> And again, “...[the aorist] may be used to describe an action or event in its entirety.”<sup>40</sup>

Applying Aspect Theory to conditional clauses results in two main classes: 1) *Assertion* (both true and false) for the sake of argument (εἰ + indicative), and 2) *Projection*. Projection includes the form εἰ + subjunctive which does not imply any degree of probability as to whether or not the condition will be fulfilled. (Notice that the determined/undetermined categories of Gildersleeve/Robertson work here.) The tense of the subjunctive simply adds its normal aspectual characteristic (i.e. either *completeness* by the aorist or *process* by the present). For example, Luke 19:31 says, “And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this, ‘The Lord has need of it.’” The present subjunctive (“asks”) shows that Luke was portraying Jesus as projecting the process of someone questioning the disciples. The context provides the deictic indicators that reveal that the questioning (if it were to actually happen) would be in the future. The parallel passage in Mark 11:3 uses an aorist subjunctive (“says”). In this case, Mark was portraying Jesus as projecting the questioning of the disciples as a whole event. Notice that the exact same event can be viewed from many different perspectives (aspects) without causing any problems for the theory. (In fact, some of the passages in one gospel where conditional clauses occur are paralleled in another gospel with a temporal clause [with ὅταν or ἐάν]<sup>41</sup>. Other deictic indicators may be seen to vary from passage to passage as well.<sup>42</sup>) Another example (this time with the aorist) is I Corinthians 14:7-9 which has three conditional clauses. Three times Paul visualizes an event as complete in itself. The examples are enlightening because in each case the event (the playing of a musical instrument or the speaking of words) could have easily been visualized as a process. James 5:19 provides a good contrast between Aspect Theory and the traditional punctiliar view of the aorist. James says, “If anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, then...” The “bringing back” can certainly be viewed as punctiliar but it is hard to view “wanders” that way because if someone wandered one time in the past then they would not need anyone to bring them back! They would already **be back** if they were not still wandering. Instead, James is projecting the event and viewing the wandering as a complete event (i.e. as a whole) as opposed to a process.

One more question needs to be addressed: “How does εἰ with the indicative differ from εἰ + subjunctive in conditional clauses?” Apart from six synoptic parallels,<sup>43</sup> there are also a number of

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<sup>39</sup> Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Compare Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27 with Luke 11:22; Matthew 6:22,23 with Luke 11:34.

<sup>42</sup> Compare Matthew 16:26 with the infinitive in Mark 8:36 and the participle in Luke 9:25; Matthew 18:12,13 with the participles in Luke 15:4,5; Matthew 24:23 and Mark 13:21 with the Future in Luke 17:23.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 5:46 with Luke 6:32; Matthew 6:14 with Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:15 with Mark 11:26 (text critical problem); Matthew 17:20 with Luke 17:6; Mark 9:43,47 with Matthew 18:8,9.

instances where class 1 conditionals occur in proximity with class 2 conditionals throughout the NT<sup>44</sup>. For example, Matthew 12:26-29 (parallel Mark 3:25-27) contains four conditional clauses three of which are class 1 (εἰ with a present indicative) while the fourth is class 2 (εἰάν with an aorist subjunctive). First, Jesus assumes for the sake of argument that Satan casts out Satan in order to prove that that assumption would be impossible because then Satan's kingdom would not be able to stand. Second, he assumes for the sake of argument that he himself casts out demons by Beelzebul in order to suggest that the Pharisees are in no position to be able to judge by whom he does cast them out. Their judgment appears arbitrary as they choose to support their own sons over Jesus for no apparent reason. Third, he assumes for the sake of argument that he casts them out by the Spirit of God in order to prove that the result would be that the kingdom of God had come. Fourth, Jesus projects the event of the binding of the strong man as a complete action in a parabolic saying that proves that Satan had been bound and was powerless to stop Jesus from casting him out. In this case, Matthew draws the reader's attention to the binding of the strong man because the aorist subjunctive is more marked here being contrasted with the more numerous present indicatives (which are also less marked morphologically). Another example is John 3:12. Jesus is talking to Nicodemus: "If (εἰ) I have told [aorist indicative] you earthly things and you did not believe, how can you believe if (εἰάν) I tell [aorist subjunctive] you heavenly things?" First, he assumes that he has told him earthly things for the sake of argument; then he projects a hypothetical situation in which he tells him heavenly things. Since Nicodemus has not believed the earthly things (the results given the assumption) then there is no reason for Jesus to tell him heavenly things and expect him to believe them. In both cases he views the telling as a whole. Acts 5:38-39 was seen by Turner as a problem for his system of classification. Understood according to Aspect Theory, however, the problem disappears. Gamaliel is not shown to be biased. He simply projects a hypothetical situation in which the work (as a process) is of men and then he assumes for the sake of argument that it is of God. In neither case is there any indication of the degree of probability or of the relationship to reality.

Aspect Theory seems to be more consistent than any other approach to conditional clauses in the NT. It is form and not time-based and it leaves nothing unexplainable even if at times its conclusions are not that different.

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<sup>44</sup> Luke 16:30-31, 22:67-68, John 13:17, I Corinthians 7:36, Galatians 1:8-9, Revelation 2:5, etc.

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