

II. Conditional Sentences in General

Certain features of conditional sentences are true of all languages. In a given instance, such features are intuitively recognized. But these need to be brought out in the open initially to overcome several misconceptions about how conditions behave in cherished texts.

A. Definition

Conditional sentences can be defined structurally or semantically.

1. Structurally

A conditional sentence has two parts: an “if” part and a “then” part. “IF” = protasis; “THEN” = apodosis.

2. Semantically

Conditions can be defined semantically in terms of the overall construction as well as the individual components.

a. The Meaning of the Construction (i.e., the Relation of the Protasis to the Apodosis)

There is often a tacit assumption that the protasis of a condition indicates the *cause* and the apodosis tells the *effect*. But this is not the only relation the two can have. In essence, there are three basic relations that a protasis can have to an apodosis: cause-effect, evidence-inference, and equivalence. It is a profitable exercise to examine the biblical text in light of these basic nuances.

1) Cause-Effect

The first relation the two parts can have is that of cause and effect. “IF” = cause; “THEN” = effect. For example:

- “If you put your hand in the fire, you will get burned.”
- “If you eat three pounds of chocolate every day for a month, you will look like a blimp!”

The NT has its share of illustrations as well:

Rom 8:13 εἰ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆτε, μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν.

If you live according to the flesh, you are about to die.

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Matt 4:9 ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσῶν προσκυνήσῃς μοι.

I will give you all these things, if you fall down and worship me

2) Evidence-Inference

The second relation the protasis can have to the apodosis is that of ground, or evidence, to inference. Here the speaker infers something (the apodosis) from some evidence. That is, he makes an induction about the *implications* that a piece of evidence suggests to him. For example,

- “If it’s Tuesday, this must be Belgium” (title of an old movie).
- “If she has a ring on her left hand, then she’s married.”

Notice that the protasis is not the *cause* of the apodosis. In fact, it is often just the opposite: “If she gets married, she will wear a ring on her left hand.” Thus, often, though not always, the ground-inference condition will semantically be the *converse* of the cause-effect condition.

Rom 8:17 εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι

Now if [we are] children, then [we are] heirs.

1 Cor 15:44 εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν.

If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual [body].

Obviously, the physical body does not *cause* the spiritual one; rather, Paul simply infers that there must be a spiritual body from the evidence of a physical one.

3) Equivalence

The third relation the two parts can have to one another is one of equivalence. That is, we could put this formula this way: “If A, then B” means the same thing as “A = B.” (This often looks very similar to evidence-inference.) For example,

- “If you are Henry’s son, then Henry is your father.”
- “If you are obedient to God, you are living righteously.” (more loosely equivalent)

Gal 2:18 εἰ γὰρ ἃ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἑμαυτὸν συνιστάνω.

For if I build up again those things that I have destroyed, I demonstrate that I am a transgressor.

Jas 2:11 εἰ ... φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου.

But if you commit murder, you have become a law-breaker.