

I. The Moods of the Greek Language

The mood of a verb is what indicates how close the stated action is to actually taking place. Thus, every language has at least two moods for its verbs: real and potential.

The Koine Greek of the New Testament has four moods of which one expresses real action while the other three express potential action. If a stated action is viewed by the writer as really occurring then he expresses it in the indicative mood. If the stated action is viewed by the writer as potentially occurring then he expresses it in the subjunctive, the optative, or the imperative moods. The possibility of the action actually occurring in any of the potential moods is contingent upon certain conditions. The subjunctive mood expresses action which is not really taking place but which is objectively possible.

Of the three potential moods, the subjunctive is the closest to reality. The optative mood expresses action which is not really taking place but which is subjectively possible. Thus, the optative mood is yet one step further removed from reality than the subjunctive.

The imperative mood expresses action which is not really taking place but which is volitionally possible. This action will occur only if the party of the first part can convince the party of the second part to produce an action which is agreeable to the will of the party of the first part. Since reality depends upon one free agent prevailing over another free agent will then this is the mood which is furthest removed from real action.

The subjunctive mood may be used in six constructions:

- a. The hortatory subjunctive is used in the first-person plural to exhort others to join in an action.
Example: *“Let us seek our entertainment elsewhere.”*
- b. The prohibitive subjunctive is the use of the second person aorist subjunctive to express a negative entreaty or command. This forbids the beginning of an act. The prohibition of the continuance of an act already in progress is expressed by the present imperative.
Example: *“Don’t come back—ever!” “Stop the ongoing process.”*
- c. The deliberative subjunctive is used to express a question which is either a mere rhetorical device expecting no answer at all or a real question which expects an answer in the imperative.
Example: *“What shall I say to you?”*
- d. The subjunctive of emphatic negation employs the double negative *ou me*, and is much stronger than the use of a single negative.
Example: *“They shall by no means escape.”*
- e. The final subjunctive is used to express purpose and is usually introduced by the particle *hina*.
Example: *“I come in order that I may speak to him.”*
- f. The subjunctive is used in conditional sentences which expresses a probable future condition which is what we refer to as the “third-class condition.” The verb in the protasis, or “if clause,” is in the subjunctive mood.
Example: *“If we’re going to have a future in this town, we’ve got to have some law and order.”*

The optative is the mood of strong contingency or possibility. It contains no definite anticipation of realization, but merely presents the action as conceivable. The optative is used only 67 times in the New Testament. Paul used it 32 times, Luke 28, Peter four, Jude twice, Mark and the writer of Hebrews once each.