

# Hortatory Subjunctive

**Hortatory** (from *hortor*, “I urge/exhort”) **Subjunctive** describes a first-person plural subjunctive verb used to urge or encourage others (usually including the speaker) to take an action.. (Let us go...” “Let us draw near...” “Let us hold fast...” “Let us consider...”) These are not suggestions; they are strong, urgent exhortations. The hortatory subjunctive expresses: exhortation (strong urging), encouragement, group inclusion (“we together”), an invitation with authority, a call to decisive action. It has the force of: “We must...” “Let us now...” “We should immediately...” It is authoritative yet pastoral.

## Key Characteristics:

- **Meaning:** Expresses “**Let’s...**”
- **Person:** Usually first-person plural (we or us). The singular form of the hortatory subjunctive is uncommon
- **Tense:** Most often the present tense.
- **Placement:** Appears in an independent (main) clause, not a dependent one.
- **Stanley Porter** writes that “There are approximately 70 plural hortatory subjunctives in the New Testament (**ED**: 12 in Hebrews), which are used to exhort an audience to participate in an action. Interestingly, the speaker does not necessarily include themselves among the participants, despite using a first-person plural form.” ([Idioms of the Greek New Testament - Page 58](#))

**Let us phrases in the New Testament**- Matt. 21:38; Matt. 26:46; Matt. 27:49; Mk. 1:38; Mk. 4:35; Mk. 9:5; Mk. 12:7; Mk. 14:42; Mk. 15:36; Lk. 2:15; Lk. 4:34; Lk. 8:22; Lk. 9:33; Lk. 15:23; Lk. 20:14; Jn. 11:7; Jn. 11:15; Jn. 11:16; Jn. 14:31; Jn. 19:24; Acts 4:17; Acts 15:36; Rom. 3:8; Rom. 13:12; Rom. 13:13; Rom. 14:13; 1Co. 5:8; 1Co. 10:8; 1Co. 10:9; 1Co. 15:32; 2Co. 7:1; Gal. 5:25; Gal. 5:26; Gal. 6:9; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 3:15; Phil. 3:16; 1Thess. 5:6; 1Thess. 5:8; Heb. 4:1; Heb. 4:11; Heb. 4:14; Heb. 4:16; Heb. 6:1; Heb. 10:22; Heb. 10:23; Heb. 10:24; Heb. 12:1; Heb. 12:28; Heb. 13:13; Heb. 13:15; 1Jn. 3:18; 1 Jn. 4:7; Rev. 19:7

## Examples:

Romans 13:12-13+ The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore **let us lay aside** the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 **Let us behave properly** as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

2 Corinthians 7:1+ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse** ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Galatians 5:25+ If we live by the Spirit, **let us also walk** by the Spirit.

Galatians 6:9,10+ **Let us not lose heart** in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, **let us do good** to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Hebrews 4:16+ Therefore **let us draw near** with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 12:1+ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, **let us also lay aside** every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

1 John 3:18+ Little children, **let us not love** with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Revelation 19:7+ “**Let us rejoice** and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”

**Why Greek uses the Hortatory Subjunctive** - Greek has no first-person imperative (command) (“we, do this!”), so the hortatory subjunctive serves this function. It is the strongest way to urge a group to action, and is commonly used in Hebrews. It can be thought of as a work-around for the imperative in the first person, i.e., a self-command. One could say a hortatory subjunctive carries the weight of a gentle command (“Let us do this”) and so in many instances it functions like an imperative. The hortatory subjunctive often expresses the community’s shared response to God’s grace — gentle urging empowered by the Holy Spirit.

**Hortatory Subjunctive** in relation to Command -- It takes a standard verb form (e.g., "we love") and turns it into an **exhortation** ("let us love"). It however is distinct from the Imperative mood. While similar to the imperative (command), the hortatory subjunctive includes the speaker ("Let's"), whereas the imperative commands others ("Go!").

**Summary** - This is a statement urging others to join in some action (commanding oneself and one's associates). (It is roughly the same as first person imperative, which does not exist in Greek.) It is easily identified because it will always be the first person plural form of the subjunctive mood. This verb form will often come near the beginning of the sentence. It is usually translated "let us...." (Thus, as a mnemonic device, it can be referred to as the '*Salad Subjunctive*'. cf. "let us" with "lettuce" - a bad joke!)

**"LET US" IN HEBREWS** - Heb. 4:1; Heb. 4:11; Heb. 4:14; Heb. 4:16; Heb. 6:1; Heb. 10:22; Heb. 10:23; Heb. 10:24; Heb. 12:1; Heb. 12:28; Heb. 13:13; Heb. 13:15

**Related Resources:**

- A T Robertson [A Grammar of the Greek New Testament - PAGE 930](#)