(The following column first appeared in the May-July 1993 edition of the Calvary Herald, a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence

by Michael Holloway

What goes through your mind when you hear the word *argument*? Do you think of angry, shouting voices and mean words? Suppose I told you that I had an argument with my wife yesterday. Would you think that it is likely that I fixed my own dinner last night?

An emotion-filled altercation is certainly one definition of argument. Arguments of this type are usually, if not always, sinful.

Another definition of argument is "a series of statements by which one attempts to prove an assertion." Arguments of this type are not usually sinful; in fact, they are the means by which we think logically and clearly, and thus are indispensable to correct theology and righteous living.

The Westminster Confession of Faith recognizes the importance of logical thinking. Section VI of Chapter I states: *The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. ...*

Scripture does not record explicitly everything we need to know. God has chosen to leave some things implicit, and we must deduce them by good and necessary consequence (that is, logical argument) from Scripture.

As a simple example, consider how I know that I am a sinner. The Scripture does not explicitly say, "Michael Holloway is a sinner." However, the Scripture does say "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.' ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:10-12, 23 NASB).

Because this passage says that every man (and woman) is a sinner, and because I am a man, the fact that I am a sinner follows by good and necessary consequence.

If we are to understand the whole counsel of God, we must understand how to construct and understand correct arguments. If we are to avoid being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting," we must know also how to recognize incorrect arguments. This column, which will be a periodic feature of the *Calvary Herald*, is designed to provide instruction toward these goals.

A logical argument consists of a series of statements. These statements are not just any old statements; each one must be either true or false. Such statements are called, by logicians at least, *propositions*. Commands, questions, and requests are not propositions, and thus are not formally part of a logical argument.

To test your understanding of this idea, read each of the following statements and decide whether it is a proposition.

1. Regeneration precedes faith.
2. This column is useless.
3. Come, follow me.
4. Is this a proposition?
5. The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Statements 1, 2, and 5 are propositions, with statements 1 and 5 being true, and statement 2 being (I hope) false. Statements 3 and 4 are not propositions.

In giving the definition of proposition, we also stated implicitly one of the fundamental laws of logic, namely the law of non-contradiction. In simple language, this law says that at any given time a proposition cannot be both true and false. If a proposition is true, it cannot also be false. If a proposition is false, it cannot also be true.

The law of non-contradiction is what gives meaning to conversation and writing. It means that every word in the sentence "My cat is a Birman" has a specific meaning. *My* does not mean *your*, *his*, or *her*. *Cat* does not mean *dog*, *fish*, or *bird*. *Is* does not mean *is not*. *Birman* does not mean *Siamese*, *Abyssinian*, or *Himalayan*. Each word has a specific meaning; otherwise, no one, including myself, would have a clue as to what I mean when I speak or write. Without the law of non-contradiction, every sentence we speak or write would be as meaningless as "Twas brillig by the slithey tove."

Many of you reading this are probably wondering, "Why is he spending so much time writing about something that is so obvious?" This is a good question, because the law of non-contradiction is obvious, but, as obvious as it is and as essential as it is, there are many people today who deny it.

Humanists who claim all truth is relative deny it. New-agers who claim all religions lead to God deny it. Ecclementicalists [sic] who claim doctrine is unimportant deny it. Liberals who claim the Bible is the Word of God, but not without error deny it.

One of the best illustrations of the absurdity of this common liberal position was given by John Gerstner in his *Handout Church History* series. Once, when speaking to a group of liberal theologians about the Scripture, Gerstner wrote the following proposition on the blackboard:

The Bible is the Word of God, which errs

He asked the group if they agreed with this proposition, and all said that they did. He erased part of the sentence, leaving

the Word of God, which errs

and stated that this proposition was equivalent to the previous one. All in the group agreed. Gerstner then erased a little more of the sentence, leaving the following:

God, which errs

No one in the group was willing to admit that this proposition described their position, but Gerstner had demonstrated that this was indeed the logical consequence of their position. To claim that the Word of God errs, but that God does not err is to violate the law of non-contradiction, which is, as we've shown above, to spout nonsense.

No one who understands even the little bit of logical thinking that we've covered here should ever be fooled by claims such as these, but millions of people are fooled. Let us pray to God that we are not ever among them.

(The following column appeared in the August 1993 edition of the Calvary Herald, a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Definitions

by Michael Holloway

Suppose that someone made the following statement to you: "I just saw a movie, and it was really bad." Would you think that the person liked the movie, or not? Suppose a teenager told you that their football team was hot. Would you think that the team was playing well, or that the players had spent too much time out in the sun?

These simple examples illustration the critical importance of *definitions*. Without knowing how the person talking about the movie defined the word "bad", it is impossible to know what they thought about the movie. Without knowing the meaning the teenager gave to "hot", it is impossible to know what he was saying about the football team.

With these examples, the consequences of not knowing the definitions given to particular words are not severe. In the first case, you might miss seeing a movie you would have enjoyed; in the second case, you might end up being embarrassed when you offered the star quarterback a drink of water.

However, in theology the consequences of not knowing the definitions can be much more severe. This is especially true in two cases: (1) reading and understanding the Scripture, and (2) communicating with and understanding other people.

In order to read and properly understand the Scripture, one must know what the words of Scripture mean. Few statements are more self-evidently true than that. However, some of the most ubiquitous theological errors within the Christian community throughout history have resulted from a misunderstanding of definitions. For example, antinomianism (the denial of the relevance of the moral law to Christians) is largely a result of a failure to understand the several different meanings the New Testament gives to the word translated in English as "law"; salvation-by-works stems from a misunderstanding of the proper scriptural meaning of "works"; and the charismatic movement errs by misunderstanding (among other things) the definition of "tongues".

To avoid falling prey to these, and other, errors, we must be diligent to learn and understand the correct meaning of the terms used in the Scripture.

Not only are definitions essential for correct understanding of Scripture, they are also essential for communicating with and understanding other people. Unless we provide clear definitions when we attempt to communicate Biblical truth to others, we are likely to be misunderstood. Unless we insist upon clear definitions from others when they talk to us, we are likely to be misled.

To illustrate the importance of definitions in communicating the truth to others, consider the following question: "Does man have a free will?"

What is the answer to this question?

It is impossible to answer the question accurately without knowing what the questioner means by the term "free will." If the questioner means the ability to choose to do what one desires, then the answer is an unequivocal "yes." However, if he means the ability to choose to believe in the gospel, without first being regenerated by God, then the answer is an unequivocal "no."

If we are asked this question, and we provide an answer to it without first clarifying the necessary definitions, we are almost certainly going to be misunderstood. Even if the questioner happens to have in mind the same definition that we do, others listening to the exchange may not.

Definitions are critically important to communication, but, in much of what passes for theological discourse today, they are conspicuously absent. In fact, the following observation from J. Gresham Machen is even more true today than it was in 1925 when he first penned it:

Indeed nothing makes a man more unpopular in the controversies of the present day than an insistence upon definition of terms. Anything, it seems, may be forgiven more readily than that. Men discourse very eloquently today upon such subjects as God, religion, Christianity, atonement, redemption, faith; but are greatly incensed when they are asked to tell in simple language what they mean by these terms. They do not like to have the flow of their eloquence checked by so vulgar a thing as a definition.

-- J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State, Essays by J. Gresham Machen*, edited by J. Robbins, The Trinity Foundation, Jefferson MD, 1987.

Although insisting on definitions may well make you unpopular, it is essential if you are to avoid being misled into supporting those who believe and teach heresy. For example, if you do not know what a Mormon means when he refers to Jesus as the Son of God, or what a neo-orthodox preacher means when he refers to the Bible as the Word of God, you may find yourself agreeing with such people, when in fact, you should be exposing them as teachers of error.

In summary, to properly understand the whole counsel of God, we must diligently learn and understand the Scripture's definitions of terms; to properly communicate God's truth to others, we must diligently provide clear definitions of the terms we use; and to guard against being deceived, we must diligently insist that others provide clear definitions of the terms they use.

[This column was introduced in the May-July 1993 issue of the Calvary Herald. Its name comes from Chapter I, Section VI of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states that "The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ...." The purpose of the column is to provide instruction in how to understand and construct logical arguments, and in how to recognize and guard against incorrect arguments.]

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Necessary Consequence: From the Scripture

by Michael Holloway

The name for this column comes from Chapter I, Section VI of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states that "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ...." In the next several columns, we want to consider in detail what is meant by the phrase "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from the Scripture." In doing so, we'll cover many of the basic principles of logical argument, as well. By the time we've finished examining the phrase, you should be able to confidently explain why statements such as the following are or are not good and necessary consequences of the Scripture:

Regeneration precedes faith.

Jesus is coming back soon.

Immersion in water is the only Scriptural mode of baptism.

Christians are obligated to obey God's Law.

To begin our examination of the phrase, we need to continue the discussion in an earlier column about the basic structure of a logical argument. Recall that a logical argument consists of a series of propositions, and that a proposition is a statement that must be either true or false. To construct an argument, propositions are grouped in such a way that one of them is claimed to follow from the others. The proposition that is affirmed on the basis of the others is called the *conclusion*; the other propositions in the argument are called the *premises*. In the following example, the first two propositions are the premises, and the third proposition is the conclusion:

All men are sinners.
I am a man.
Therefore, I am a sinner.

Of course, most arguments in real life are not written so simply as this example, which means that identifying the premises and conclusions can be more difficult. Although there is no foolproof procedure for identifying premises and conclusions, there are some words and phrases that tend to suggest the presence of one or the other. For example, the following phrases often signify that a conclusion is about to follow: therefore, hence, thus, proves that, as a result, for this reason, which implies that, it follows that, consequently. Similarly, the following phrases often mark the premises of an argument: since, because, for, may be inferred from, as shown by, may be deduced from, follows from.

To test your own ability in this area, read each of the following arguments and for each identify its conclusion and the premises supporting that conclusion.

1. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8, NASB)

2. A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. (Constitution of the United States, Amendment 2)

3. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:16, NASB)

4. In 1972 Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote that "punishment for the sake of retribution is not permissible under the Eighth Amendment." That is absurd. The element of retribution does not make punishment cruel and unusual, it makes punishment intelligible. It distinguishes punishment form therapy. Rehabilitation may be an ancillary result of punishment, but we punish to serve justice, by giving people what they deserve. (George Will, *Newsweek*, 24 May 1982, p. 92)

5. As always, all the issues are ultimately theological. All the problems we encounter--whether issues of crime or morality or economics or the environment or anything else you can imagine--are issues ultimately shaped by our sense of who God is and how we are supposed to live before him. (Joel Belz, "Sociology without theology," *World*, 25 December 1993, p. 3)

Understanding the distinction between conclusions and premises is essential to understanding the meaning of the section of the Westminster Confession about which we are concerned. Recall that Chapter I, Section IV states: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ...."

This phrase means, among other things, that the Scripture contains **all** of the premises that can legitimately be used to reach conclusions about the whole counsel of God. If this section of the Confession is an accurate statement of God's truth about the Bible, which I believe it is, then it has significant practical implications. We will fully explore these implications as we study further in future columns, but I will close this column by briefly illustrating an important one with a personal example.

A few months ago I had a conversation with a fellow believer about the issue of the role of women in the church. In particular, we discussed whether women should be allowed to teach the Scripture to men. In the midst of discussing the germane biblical passages, my friend said, "I know women who are excellent teachers and know more about the Bible than any man; surely they should be able to teach men." My response was, "I know women like that, too, but that is irrelevant to this discussion." My friend didn't understand this response at all, but, anyone reading this column should understand it fully.

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Necessary Consequence: Answers to Last Month's Exercises

by Michael Holloway

Last month, I challenged you to test your ability to distinguish between premises and conclusions by reading five different arguments and separating each into its conclusion and the premises supporting that conclusion. Before giving the answers, here are the five arguments repeated, just in case you've misplaced last month's *Calvary Herald*:

1. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8, NASB)

2. A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. (Constitution of the United States, Amendment 2)

3. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:16, NASB)

4. In 1972 Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote that "punishment for the sake of retribution is not permissible under the Eighth Amendment." That is absurd. The element of retribution does not make punishment cruel and unusual, it makes punishment intelligible. It distinguishes punishment form therapy. Rehabilitation may be an ancillary result of punishment, but we punish to serve justice, by giving people what they deserve. (George Will, *Newsweek*, 24 May 1982, p. 92)

5. As always, all the issues are ultimately theological. All the problems we encounter--whether issues of crime or morality or economics or the environment or anything else you can imagine--are issues ultimately shaped by our sense of who God is and how we are supposed to live before him. (Joel Belz, "Sociology without theology," *World*, 25 December 1993, p. 3)

If you didn't already attempt the exercise, try it now before looking at the answers below. But don't peek. Here are the answers:

1. **Conclusion:** the one who does not love does not know God
   Premise: God is love

2. **Conclusion:** the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed
   Premise: a well regulated militia [is] necessary to the security of a free State

3. **Conclusion:** not even Christ has been raised
   Premise: if the dead are not raised

4. **Conclusion:** that (referring to Justice Marshall's statement about punishment for the sake of retribution) is absurd
   Premise (1): the element of retribution does not make punishment cruel and unusual, it makes punishment intelligible

Premise (2): [the element of retribution] distinguishes punishment from therapy
Premise (3): rehabilitation may be an ancillary result of punishment, but we punish to serve justice, by giving people what they deserve

5. **Conclusion:** all the issues are ultimately theological
Premise: all the problems we encounter--whether issues of crime or morality or economics or the environment or anything else you can imagine--are issues ultimately shaped by our sense of who God is and how we are supposed to live before him

How well did you do? If you have any questions, comments, or disputes about any of these, please let me know.

Before leaving the subject of premises and conclusions, there is one more point we need to cover: all of the premises and conclusions of an argument are not always stated explicitly. For those of you who are interested in such things, the technical term for an argument in which only parts are stated is an *enthymeme*.

Because of the vast amount of knowledge that is assumed in almost any statement we make, most real-world arguments are, in fact, almost always enthymemes of some type. Consider, for example, the very simple argument we've used before:

All men are sinners.
I am a man.
Therefore, I am a sinner.

All of the premises necessary to establish this as a complete and correct argument are not present. At the very least, the argument should read something like the following:

The Bible says that all men are sinners.
The Bible is the Word of God.
God always tells the truth.
I am a man.
Therefore, I am a sinner.

Of course, even this is incomplete, because it does not establish that the Bible is the Word of God, or that God always tells the truth, or that I am a man. The complete argument would be quite complex. This complexity, along with an assumption that people share a certain amount of common knowledge, is why most real-world arguments are abbreviated.

Next month, we'll begin examining how to tell if a given argument, whether it be complete or abbreviated, is correct; or, in the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, if it consists of "good and necessary consequences." This is where the real fun will begin.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 10, no. 3, 1994), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Timeout for a Story

by Michael Holloway

In one of his tape series on theology, R. C. Sproul tells an interesting and enlightening story from his college days. The instructor for a particular systematic theology course in which Mr. Sproul was enrolled was John Gerstner. Professor Gerstner would on occasion challenge his students' mastery of the course material by playing the role of a "devil's advocate" for some heretical position and requiring his students to successfully refute his arguments for that heresy.

One day, Professor Gerstner decided to play the role of a Mormon theologian. He began that day's class by presenting arguments in support of the proposition that God has a physical body. After he finished his argument, he invited the students to explain to him from the Scripture why he was wrong. No one immediately jumped at this challenge, so Professor Gerstner asked R. C. Sproul to make an attempt at refutation.

Mr. Sproul began by saying that he would begin with the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4. In particular he would cite verse 24, in which Jesus stated: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB)

Professor Gerstner responded by saying that this was all well and good, but that the passage only stated that God was a spirit; it did not say that God did not also have a body. Since he did not claim that God did not have a spirit, but only that God did have a physical body, this passage in no way refuted his central proposition.

Mr. Sproul replied that he understood this, but that he was not finished with his refutation. He went on to discuss the context in which Jesus' uttered the words recorded in verse 24, and claimed that this context demonstrated that God was not confined to a single location in space, and that, therefore, God could not have a physical body.

"No! No! No! That just won't do!" was Professor Gerstner's reply.

At that, Mr. Sproul conceded defeat, and another student made an attempt, and then another, and another, and another; all to no avail. By the time the class period was nearing an end, the students were all just about ready to become Mormons.

Finally, Mr. Sproul asked the professor to explain to them how they could successfully refute a Mormon theologian on the point in question. He replied that there were several possible approaches but that the one that he would probably use would be to begin with the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4. In particular he would cite verse 24, in which Jesus stated: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB)

Professor Gerstner said that a competent Mormon theologian would respond to these statements by saying that this was all well and good, but that the passage only stated that God was a spirit; it did not say that God did not also have a body. And since he did not claim that God did not have a spirit, but only that God did have a physical body, this passage in no way refuted his central proposition.

To this, the professor said he would reply that he understood, but that he was not finished with his refutation. He said that he would then go on to discuss the context in which Jesus' uttered the words recorded in verse 24, and claim that this context demonstrated that God was not confined to a single location in space, and that, therefore, God could not have a physical body. This would complete the argument.

"But Professor Gerstner, that is the exact same argument I used," Mr. Sproul said.

"That is correct," the professor responded.

"When I used the argument, you dismissed it by saying 'No! No! No! That just won't do!'"

"Is that an argument?"

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 10, no. 4, 1994), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: What is Good and Necessary?

by Michael Holloway

Suppose you are talking to your neighbor one day, and he says to you that he does not believe that God exists. You ask him why he does not believe there is a God. He replies:

> If God were able and willing to prevent evil, he would do so. If God were unable to prevent evil, he would not be omnipotent; if he were unwilling to prevent evil, he would not be loving. God does not prevent evil. If God exists, he is both omnipotent and loving. Therefore, God does not exist.

What would you say to this neighbor? Think about this for a moment or two before you continue reading.

One thing that you should not say, unless you want to speak falsely, is that your neighbor's argument is invalid. The argument is perfectly valid. Now, before you call Pete and insist that he stop letting a heretic write in the *Calvary Herald*, please let me explain.

Your hypothetical neighbor's argument for the non-existence of God illustrates a very important point: the validity of an argument and the truth of its conclusion are not the same thing. There is a relationship between the validity or invalidity of arguments and the truth or falsity of propositions, but the relationship is not a simple one.

In a **valid** argument, *if* all of the premises are true, then the conclusion must necessarily be true. An argument is **sound** if it is valid and all of its premises are known to be true. A sound argument proves its conclusion. That is, if an argument is sound, then we have no choice---short of abandoning reason---except to believe its conclusion. When the Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of "good and necessary consequence", it is speaking of sound argument. We could legitimately paraphrase Chapter I, Section VI to say "The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or may be deduced by sound argument from Scripture ...." [1]

The argument given by the neighbor is valid because *if* each of its five premises is true, then its conclusion ("God does not exist") is also true. (Techniques for determining whether an argument is valid will be discussed in future columns. For now, you'll just have to trust me that this one is valid.) The argument is unsound however, because at least one of its premises is false. Can you determine which one?

If an argument is unsound, then we are not compelled by the argument itself to believe that its conclusion is true. However, this does not mean that the conclusion cannot be true; it only means that the given argument does not establish the conclusion's truth. As an example, consider the following argument:

> All people are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

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[1] Actually, this isn't quite true. Many of the statements in the WCF are based on inductive, not deductive, reasoning, but we've not studied inductive arguments yet. The term *sound* doesn't apply to inductive arguments; the closest analogous term is *strong*. So, a correct paraphrase would read, "The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or may be deduced by either sound deductive argument or strong inductive argument from Scripture ...."

All Christians are people.
Therefore, all Christians are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

This argument is valid---if both of the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true---but it is unsound, because the first premise is false. Therefore, based on this argument alone, we do not have to acknowledge that the conclusion is true. Of course, we know from other sources besides this argument, namely the Scripture, that the conclusion is in fact true.

An **invalid** argument is one in which it is possible for all the premises to be true, but for the conclusion to still be false; such arguments are also often said to be **fallacious**. Many different types of fallacious arguments exist, and we will examine these in more detail in future columns. For now, consider the following three invalid arguments and try to determine why it is possible in each of them for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false:

Polls show that a large majority of professing Christians believe in a premillennial, pretribulation rapture of believers. Therefore, the Bible must teach a premillennial eschatology.

The Daily Press opposes Oliver North. We know that the Daily Press is liberal; therefore, the right thing to do is to support Oliver North.

If a ministry is pleasing to God, then it will succeed. The Mormon church is successful. Therefore, the Mormon church must be pleasing to God.

As with unsoundness, the invalidity of an argument does not necessarily mean that its conclusion is false. Invalidity simply means that a particular argument is insufficient grounds on which to claim that the conclusion is true. To demonstrate the truth of a conclusion requires some other argument than the invalid one given. For example, if supporting Oliver North is the right thing to do, another argument besides the fact that the local newspaper opposes him must be given (whether such an argument is possible is a suitable subject for a political column, but not for this column). Throughout history many fallacious "proofs" for the existence of God have been formulated. In the case of these "proofs", their conclusion ("God exists") is true, but the arguments themselves do nothing to establish that fact.

To summarize the discussion: a **valid** argument is one in which *if* all of the premises are true, then the conclusion must necessarily be true. A **sound** argument is a valid argument with all of its premises known to be true. Sound arguments establish without doubt the truth of their conclusion. An unsound argument is a valid argument with at least one false premise. An invalid argument is one in which all of the premises can be truth, but the conclusion still be false. Neither unsound nor invalid arguments tell us anything about whether their conclusion is true or false. We should never be persuaded by an unsound or an invalid argument.

So, how should you answer your hypothetical neighbor's argument? Perhaps you could begin with something like, "Yes, that is a valid argument, but it is not a sound one. Not all of your premises are true. You say that if God were unwilling to prevent evil, he would not be loving, but the Scripture says ...."

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Necessary Consequence: A Brief Note on Sources

by Michael Holloway

In looking back over the previous installments of *Necessary Consequence*, I realized that no column to date has discussed the sources on which these discussions are based. This month's brief column will correct that deficiency.

In order to ensure accuracy, I check all the definitions I give against three different logic textbooks. Two of these books were written by Christian authors:

> *Logic*, by Gordon H. Clark, The Trinity Foundation, Jefferson, Maryland, 1988
>
> *Introductory Logic*, revised edition, by Douglas J. Wilson, Mars Hill Textbook Series, Canon Press, Moscow, Idaho, 1992.

Wilson's book is used in teaching logic to 8th graders at the Logos School in Moscow (and at other Christian and home schools across the country). It contains a number of examples and exercises. There is a solution manual, which I also consult from time to time, that contains the answers to all of the exercises. The Trinity Foundation has also published a workbook and solution manual to go along with Clark's book.

The third textbook that I consult in writing this column was written by unbelievers:

> *Introduction to Logic*, 9th edition, by Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1994.

This book has a solution section at the back that contains answers to a representative selection of the exercises given in the main text. Taking into account all of the nine editions that have been published, this book is far and away the most commonly used introductory logic text in college and universities in this country.

All three of these books agree on the basic definitions and descriptions of the important terms in logic that I've presented in *Necessary Consequence* columns so far. That is, the definitions given to terms such as *premise, conclusion, validity, soundness,* and *fallacious* are those that are generally used by all logicians and philosophers, whether they are believers or not. Only in the choice of symbols used in describing and using symbolic logic (which we won't be covering in this column anytime soon) is there any substantial disagreement among these three books. So, if there's anyone out there who is thinking that I might be making things up, or that I might be giving incorrect definitions, please be assured that this is not the case.

If anyone is interested in further study on the subjects presented in *Necessary Consequence*, you should obtain at least one of these books. If you want more information on purchasing one or more of the books, please write to me at the *Calvary Herald*. Also, please write to me if you have any suggestions for subjects to address in future columns.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 10, no. 7, 1994), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Some of My Favorite Fallacies

by Michael Holloway

A few weeks ago, shortly before Douglas Wilder withdrew from the race, there was a debate in Farmville between the four leading candidates in the Senate campaign. I did not watch the debate when it took place, but I did tape it and watch the proceedings a few days later. As the tape played, I found myself saying over and over again --- sometimes to myself, sometimes out loud, sometimes out loud with a raised voice --- "That's fallacious."

I cannot recall a single instance in which someone gave a coherent and valid argument for a particular position. Every once in a while, one candidate or another did manage to stumble upon a true conclusion, but the arguments given to support that conclusion were rarely, if ever, valid. Because the quality of discourse in the campaigns has not improved since the meeting in Farmville, I can think of no better time to discuss some of the most common types of fallacious arguments.

(Recall from the *Necessary Consequence* column in Volume 10, Number 4, that an argument is fallacious, or invalid, if it is possible for all the premises to be true, but for the conclusion to still be false. The invalidity of an argument does not *necessarily* mean that its conclusion is false. Invalidity simply means that a particular argument is *insufficient* to prove that the conclusion is true.)

One of the fallacies most frequently employed by politicians is known as the argument *ad hominem* (as you will see as you continue to read, many fallacies have been given Latin names). An ad hominem argument seeks to disparage the character, intelligence, or reasonableness of a proponent of a conclusion in order to argue against that conclusion. Here are two examples of ad hominem arguments, one from politics and one from theology:

> Powerful Senators and Congressmen oppose term limits, because they don't want to lose their power; therefore, we should support term limits.
>
> Postmillennialists often use the same approach to interpreting Scripture as do the liberals; therefore, true conservative believers cannot be postmillennial.

Such arguments are invalid, because the truth or falsity of a conclusion is independent from the characteristics of those arguing for (or against) it. Another example of reasoning that succumbs to this fallacy is the statement attributed to Gandhi that were it not for the Christians he had known, he would be a Christian.

Another type of fallacy that is wide-spread within politics and society in general is known as argument *ad populum*. An argument that commits this fallacy appeals to that which is popular, suggesting that if something is believed by a large number of people, then it must be true. Here are two examples illustrating ad populum arguments:

> Polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe the federal government should guarantee health insurance to every person; therefore, the right thing for the government to do is to provide universal health insurance.

> The Assembly of God denomination is the fastest growing denomination in the country; therefore, the charismatic gifts must still exist today.

Arguments *ad misericordiam* are also popular. Fallacious arguments of this type replace logical reasoning with appeals to the sympathy or pity of those to whom the argument is made. Two examples of this fallacy include the following:

> My mother's only source of income is her small Social Security check; therefore we cannot eliminate or reduce Social Security benefits.

> If faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, then what about those poor people who've never heard the gospel? Surely, it isn't fair for God to send them to hell, when they never had a chance to accept Him.

Yet another type of invalid argument that is often used is known as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, which is Latin for "after this, therefore because of this." Arguments of this type claim that because one event occurred after another one, the first must have been the cause of the second. Two examples:

> Presidents Reagan and Bush strengthened the military. After the U.S. military was strong again, the Soviet Union collapsed; therefore, increased military spending by the U.S. was one of the causes of the break-up of the Soviet Union.

> Shortly after the Supreme Court outlawed spoken prayers in government schools, SAT scores went down; therefore, removing spoken prayer from the schools caused the drop in test scores.

There are many more types of fallacious arguments, and we will discuss some of them in future columns, but the four listed above --- *ad hominem*, *ad populum*, *ad misericordiam*, and *post hoc ergo propter hoc* --- are amoung the most common and the most easily recognized. Be on the lookout for them in the coming weeks and months, and do not allow yourself to be persuaded by them, whether they be advanced by politicians, theologians, teachers, columnists, or anyone else.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 11, no. 1, 1995), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: The Limits of Logic

by Michael Holloway

Many theological errors result from concentrating on a particular Biblical truth while ignoring other ones. For example, dispensationalism concentrates on the points of discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, and ignores the points of continuity between the Covenants. In contrast, Messianic Judaism tends to concentrate on continuity and to ignore discontinuity. A truly Biblical position must give proper balance to both continuity and discontinuity, for that is what the Bible itself does.

The tendency to imbalance is no less prevalent when it comes to discussions of the proper role of logic and the intellect in a Christian's life. There are many professing Christians today who deprecate the intellect, and claim that we ought to trust our feelings alone. One of the primary reasons for this column is to provide a counterbalance to this erroneous emotionalism. In doing so, however, I do not want to elevate the importance of logic beyond the level at which Scripture places it. Logic is *necessary*, but it is not *sufficient*; it has limits.

Logic cannot convert the unbeliever. Although we are commanded to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" *(1 Peter 3:15 NKJV)*, we are also told that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" *(1 Corinthians 2:14)*. Unbelievers, even highly-trained logicians, when confronted with a logically sound argument for the truth of Christianity will refuse to acknowledge that truth, unless, in Van Til's words, "God pleases by his Spirit to take the scales from his eyes and the mask from his face" *(Christian Apologetics, p. 65)*.

In recognizing that logic cannot convert, we need to recognize also the difference between that which is objectively true, and that which is subjectively acceptable to the unbeliever. Christianity *is* objectively true, but an unbeliever is not an objective evaluator. Rather than consider carefully the evidence of the truth of Christianity, the unbeliever will "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" *(Romans 1:18)*. As Thomas Watson wrote, an unbeliever "is no more able to judge sacred things aright than a blind man is to judge colours" *(The Godly Man's Picture, p. 20)*.

Some people will acknowledge the accuracy of the preceding two paragraphs, and then conclude that as a result, there is no reason to strive to defend the truth of Christianity. I will leave the refutation of such a conclusion as an exercise to the reader.

Logic cannot resolve every mystery. God has revealed to us everything that we need to know, but He has not revealed to us everything. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" *(Deuteronomy 29:29)*. Understanding logic is essential in learning about what God has revealed, but it will not help us to penetrate what God has chosen to keep secret.

For example, a good understanding of logic can help us to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in a way that is not contradictory or inconsistent (for an example, see the *Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II*), but it does not enable us to fully understand God's nature. Likewise, logic can help us to state the doctrines of providence, predestination, and man's responsibility in a consistent and non-contradictory way (*WCF, Chapters III and V*), but it does not allow us to comprehend exactly how all events transpire in accordance with these doctrines.

We must labor to understand as much of God's revelation as we can; "There is no virtue whatever in ignorance, but much virtue in a knowledge of what God has revealed" *(J. Gresham Machen, What is Faith?, p. 160).* Nevertheless, we must remember also that "the plumbline of reason is too short to fathom the deep things of God" *(The Godly Man's Picture, p 27).* We are not God; therefore, our knowledge will never be complete. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts" *(Isaiah 55:8-9).*

Logic cannot replace emotion. We in the Reformed community often lament the tendency of many Christians, especially those within charismatic and pentecostal churches, to always follow their feelings. We rightly assert that the Scripture calls us to be thinking Christians, and to go "to the law and to the testimony" *(Isaiah 8:20)* to discover God's will.

All too often, however, we forget that God created man to both think and to feel. We forget that emotions are not, in themselves, sinful (John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it proves the point conclusively). And, as R. L. Dabney wrote, we "forget that the efficacious movement of the feelings is just as essential a part of a true religious experience, as the illumination of the intellect by divine truth; for indeed, there is not such thing as the implantation of practical principle, or the right decisions of the will, without feeling" *(Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney, Volume 3, p. 1).*

We should not be controlled by our feelings, but neither should we always suppress them, or assume that they are always wrong. Our example is to be Christ, not Spock; we are Christians, not Vulcans. Sometimes God may use our emotions to stimulate us to think further about an issue that we once thought was settled. For example, I had an uneasy feeling about many of the teachings of dispensational theology long before I was able to articulate its errors. Without that uneasy feeling, I probably would not have taken the time to study the issue in depth, and would still be living in ignorance of much of God's truth.

To ignore logic, or to claim that it is irrelevant to Christianity, is to be un-Scriptural. To worship logic, or to claim that it is all there is to Christianity, is to be equally un-Scriptural. Let us pray that God will give us the grace to avoid both errors.

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Necessary Consequence: Constructing Valid Arguments (Part 1)

by Michael Holloway

The reaction of many long-time readers to the title of this issue's column is probably something like this: "Finally! I thought he could only talk about how *not* to argue, and didn't think he'd ever get around to talking about arguing properly!" In previous issues, we've talked about why Christians need to know about logic and about the limits of logic. We've talked about the components of logical arguments, about various ways to classify arguments, and about several of the most common forms of invalid arguments. So far, we've not talked much at all about how to construct valid arguments; but as the saying goes, that was then, this is now.

In a real sense, the discussion in this column is premature. We have not yet introduced the distinction between traditional (or syllogistic) logic and symbolic logic, nor have we laid the requisite foundations for either approach, nor have we settled on which approach to pursue in detail. Nevertheless, I think that the average reader will find the discussion useful, even if the logicians among us will find it something less than satisfying.

The simplest way to construct a valid argument is to follow a pattern (or form) of argument that is known to be valid. There are many such argument forms, but we will look at only two of them in this issue.

Consider the following argument:

> If it is raining, then Michael will take an umbrella when he goes outside. It is raining. Therefore, Michael will take an umbrella when he goes outside.

Although there are many words in this argument, its form can be expressed quite simply in the following way:

> **Premise 1:** If P, then Q
> **Premise 2:** P
> **Conclusion:** Therefore, Q

The first premise asserts nothing about the truth or falsity of either P or Q alone, but it does say that *if* P is true, *then* Q will also be true. The second premise asserts that P is in fact true. From these two premises, concluding that Q is true is always valid. This particular form of argument is called *modus ponens* (from the Latin *modus*, meaning "method", and *ponere*, meaning "to affirm"). By substituting various propositions for P and Q, many valid arguments can be created. Here are three examples. Because all three follow the modus ponens form, they are all valid; are all three arguments also sound?

> If the Bible is the Word of God, then it will be internally consistent. The Bible is the Word of God. Therefore, it will be internally consistent.

> If abortion is murder, then it should be illegal. Abortion is murder. Therefore, it should be illegal.

> If everyone should be eligible to vote, then voter registration should be as simple as possible.

Everyone should be eligible to vote. Therefore, voter registration should be as simple as possible.

Modus tollens (from the Latin *tollere,* meaning "to deny") is the name of another valid argument form. The first premise in the modus tollens argument form is the same as the first premise in the modus ponens form, that is: If P, then Q. The second premise, however, is different; rather than asserting P is true as in a modus ponens argument, the second premise in a modus tollens argument, denies that Q is true. As a result, the conclusion denies that P is true.

Premise 1: If P, then Q
Premise 2: Not Q
Conclusion: Therefore, not P

The following specific examples illustrate the use of the modus tollens form:

If it is raining, then Michael will take an umbrella when he goes outside. Michael did not take an umbrella when he went outside. Therefore, it is not raining.

If the Koran is the Word of God, then it will be internally consistent. The Koran is not internally consistent. Therefore, the Koran is not the Word of God.

If drama is a legitimate form of worship, then the Bible must say that it is. The Bible does not say that it is. Therefore, drama is not a legitimate form of worship.

Now that you know two valid argument forms, consider the following argument:

If Christianity is true, then it will be internally consistent. Christianity is internally consistent. Therefore, Christianity is true.

Does it use the form of either modus ponens or modus tollens?

At a quick glance, this argument may appear to be an instance of modus ponens, but if you examine the structure carefully, you will see that it is of the following form: If P, then Q. Q. Therefore, P. This is not modus ponens, because the second premise is Q (it should be P), and the conclusion is P (it should be Q). Rather than being a valid argument, this argument illustrates the fallacy of *affirming the consequent*.

In the example given above, it may not be immediately obvious that the argument is a fallacy; however, in the following example, which follows the same form, the invalidity of the argument is obvious.

If Augustine wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, then Augustine was a great theologian. Augustine was a great theologian. Therefore, Augustine wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Modus ponens is one of the most commonly used valid argument forms; affirming the consequent is one of the most commonly committed fallacies. If you hear or read any especially egregious examples of this fallacy, let me know. I'll include the most interesting examples in my next column. In the next column, we'll also look at the fallacy of *denying the antecedent,* and at some more valid argument forms.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 11, no. 6, 1995), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Constructing Valid Arguments (Part 2)

by Michael Holloway

Earlier this year (Volume 11, Number 2), we started looking at techniques for constructing valid arguments. In particular, we noted that the simplest way to construct a valid argument is to follow a pattern (or form) of argument that is known to be valid. We explained two particular valid forms of argument: *modus ponens* (If P then Q; P; therefore, Q) and *modus tollens* (If P, then Q; not Q; therefore, not P). Finally, we discussed the fallacy of *affirming the consequent,* which results from perverting the modus ponens argument pattern. In this column, we'll first look at an invalid deviation from the modus tollens pattern, and then consider another valid argument pattern.

The fallacy of *denying the antecedent* occurs when someone makes an assertion of the following form:

> If P, then Q.
> Not P.
> Therefore, not Q.

This form of argument is deceptively similar to the valid modus tollens pattern, but it is invalid (recall that an *invalid* argument is one in which the premises can be true, but the conclusion can be false). Arguments of this form are invalid because things other than just P may lead to the truth of Q. The following example illustrates the point.

> If Jonathan Edwards wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, then he was a brilliant theologian. Jonathan Edwards did not write *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Therefore, Jonathan Edwards was not a brilliant theologian.

Certainly, the author of *The Institutes* was a brilliant theologian, but this work is not the only one ever written that demonstrates theological insight. So the fact that Edwards did not write *The Institutes* does not mean that he was not a brilliant theologian.

Modus ponens and modus tollens are probably the most commonly used valid argument patterns, and, not surprisingly, the fallacious corruptions of these patterns are probably the most commonly committed fallacies. Although many arguments can be formulated using only these two patterns, other patterns are often necessary also. One such additional useful argument form is known as the *hypothetical syllogism*. (Why, you ask, doesn't this have a Latin name like so many of the other terms in logic? I do not know.) The hypothetical syllogism looks like the following:

> If P, then Q.
> If Q, then R.
> Therefore, if P, then R.

That is, if we know that P implies Q and we know that Q implies R, then we may conclude that P also implies R. Here are some arguments that make use of the hypothetical syllogism form.

If the Bible is the Word of God, then Romans 3:23 is true.
If Romans 3:23 is true, then everyone is a sinner.
Therefore, if the Bible is the Word of God, then everyone is a sinner.

If Joe obeys God's Word, then Joe rears his children in the Lord.
If Joe rears his children in the Lord, then he will have faithful children.
Therefore, if Joe obeys God's Word, then he will have faithful children.

If the ball is set well, then it will be easy to spike.
If the ball is easy to spike, then it will probably result in a point.
Therefore, if the ball is set well, it will probably result in a point.

In using the hypothetical syllogism, one should always keep in mind exactly what it proves. Taking the second illustration above, does that argument prove that Joe has faithful children?

No, it does not. All the argument proves is that *if* it is the case that Joe obeying God's Word means he rears his children in the Lord, and *if* it is the case that Joe rearing his children in the Lord means he will have faithful children, *then* it is also the case that Joe obeying God's Word means he will have faithful children. It may be that Joe will not obey God's Word; this means both premises in the argument are true, and the conclusion is true, but the entire argument is irrelevant because it does not apply. (Of course, it could be that rearing children in the Lord does not always result in faithful children; in which case, the second premise is false, and we can conclude nothing about the truth of the conclusion. However, the need to demonstrate the truth of the premises applies all arguments, not just to the form we're considering here.)

Given the limitation just discussed, some of you may be questioning whether the hypothetical syllogism has much practical value. In practice, the hypothetical syllogism is rarely used alone; it is used most frequently in combination with modus ponens, using a form like the following:

If P, then Q.	
If Q, then R.	
Therefore, if P, then R.	*hypothetical syllogism*
P.	
Therefore, R.	*modus ponens*

Recasting the argument about Joe in this form, we have

If Joe obeys God's Word, then Joe rears his children in the Lord.
If Joe rears his children in the Lord, then he will have faithful children.
Therefore, if Joe obeys God's Word, then he will have faithful children.
Joe obeys God's Word.
Therefore, he will have faithful children.

This argument, assuming that the premises can be shown to be true, does establish that Joe will have faithful children. Interested readers are invited to provide arguments to demonstrate whether the premises are true. Of course, the assignment will be more interesting if you consider cases beyond just Joe.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 12, no. 2, 1996), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Will My Children Go To Heaven? (Part 1)

by Michael Holloway

I closed my last column (Vol. 11, No. 6) by giving the following example of an argument that combines modus ponens with a hypothetical syllogism:

> If Joe obeys God's Word, then Joe rears his children in the Lord.
> If Joe rears his children in the Lord, then he will have faithful children.
> Therefore, if Joe obeys God's Word, then he will have faithful children.
> Joe obeys God's Word.
> Therefore, he will have faithful children.

I noted that this argument, assuming that the premises are true, establishes that Joe will have faithful children. And I invited interested readers to provide arguments to demonstrate whether the premises are true, suggesting that any such readers consider cases beyond just the hypothetical Joe.

Apparently, none of our readers were interested, because none have replied to my invitation; however, a recently published book, *Will My Children Go To Heaven?* by Edward N. Gross, directly addresses the relevant issue. In his preface, Dr. Gross writes, "I will show from Scripture that parents can be sure that their children will be saved and go to heaven." A few sentences later, he makes clear that he is not referring to *all* parents, but only to those parents who are "faithful" to fulfil the duties God has given to them. Thus, his conclusion is basically the same as the second premise in our argument; if Dr. Gross proves his conclusion, we can confidently assert that our second premise is also true. (Of course, if Dr. Gross does not prove his conclusion, this does not necessarily mean that it is false; it means only that *he* has not shown otherwise.)

Does Dr. Gross prove his conclusion? Douglas Jones certainly seems to think so. In his review of the book in *Credenda/Agenda* (Volume 7, Number 4), Jones writes: "The book's main point is to explain and revive the once dominant doctrine of covenantal succession, the view that God has promised salvation to the children of faithful Christian parents. Contrary to the popular view that the children of Christian parents have an ambiguous future, perhaps Christian, perhaps pagan, covenantal succession maintains that the normal course of Christian parenting is to produce and nurture godly offspring and that if the abnormal occurs---faithless children---then the parents bear central responsibility. ... Terrifyingly beautiful truths indeed, and Gross takes the reader very tenderly and soundly through the biblical teaching on the subject. ... The book is intended as a popular, pastoral, nontechnical treatment for parents. I'm aware of several other treatments of this topic in the works, but get this one first."

Although Mr. Jones does not provide a detailed logical analysis of the book, his review shows that he believes Dr. Gross has adequately proven his conclusion by "good and necessary" consequence from Scripture. My decision to purchase the book last September was prompted by this strong endorsement.

After reading and studying the book carefully, I reached two conclusions. First, Dr. Gross *does not* prove his conclusion. Second, a logical analysis of the book would be a good topic for a *Necessary Consequence* column. Once I started to develop the analysis, I quickly reached a third conclusion: one column would not suffice, because the analysis requires a concept we have not covered. The rest of this column introduces the needed concept, which is the distinction between *deductive* and *inductive*

arguments. My analysis of Dr. Gross' arguments will appear, God willing, in a future issue.

All of our discussions in the previous 13 installments of this column have been about deductive arguments. We have seen that a deductive argument is an argument in which the premises are claimed to establish the conclusion without a doubt. We know that the form of a deductive argument determines whether it is valid or invalid. We also know that a sound deductive argument is one that has both a valid form and true premises. The truth of the conclusion of a sound deductive argument is certain.

Inductive arguments are different. Rather than establishing the truth of a conclusion with *certainty*, an inductive argument only establishes the truth of a conclusion with *probability*. We do not speak of the validity or soundness of an inductive argument; we speak of its *strength*. A *strong* inductive argument has high probability that its conclusion is true; a *weak* inductive argument has low probability that its conclusion is true.

Here are three examples of strong inductive arguments:

> Greg Maddux is pitching today; therefore, the Braves will win the game.
>
> Children who study Latin score higher on English vocabulary tests than do children who do not study Latin; therefore, studying Latin improves a child's vocabulary.
>
> A large percentage of people who smoke regularly get lung cancer; therefore, if you smoke, you are likely to get lung cancer.

Each of these is an *inductive* argument because its premises do not *guarantee* the truth of its conclusion. Greg Maddux occasionally loses a game. Factors other than studying Latin might account for the differences in vocabulary. Not everyone who smokes gets lung cancer.

Each of these is a *strong* inductive argument, because its premises make the probability high that its conclusion is true. Greg Maddux does not lose often. Many English words come from Latin. A smoker's probability of getting lung cancer is high.

The distinction between an inductive and a deductive argument, and the notion of the strength of an inductive argument will both be important in the upcoming analysis of Dr. Gross' book.

As a final note, some of you may have heard the difference between inductive and deductive arguments explained as follows: deductive arguments go from the general to the specific, while inductive arguments go from the specific to the general. This is itself an inductive definition. It is often true, but not always.

(The following column appeared in the Calvary Herald (vol. 12, no. 5, 1995), a publication of Calvary Reformed Presbyterian Church in Hampton, Virginia <www.clearlight.com/~crpc/>.)

Necessary Consequence: Will My Children Go To Heaven? (Part 2)

by Michael Holloway

Will My Children Go To Heaven? is the title of a recently published book by Edward N. Gross. Dr. Gross' answer to his title question is, "Yes, if you are a faithful Christian parent." In the February/March edition of the *Calvary Herald* (volume 12, number 2), I stated the opinion that Dr. Gross fails to show that his answer is right. In this issue's column, I will explain the reasoning that supports this opinion.

Recall that one of the foundational premises of this column is that the Westminster Confession of Faith is correct when it states in Chapter I, Section VI: *The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*.... Thus, the assertion "all children of faithful Christian parents will be saved" is true if either the Scripture explicitly states it, or it may be deduced from Scripture by "good and necessary consequence." The question before us is whether Dr. Gross shows that at least one of these two conditions is satisfied.

We may quickly focus our attention on the second condition. Dr. Gross places particular importance on several specific Scripture passages, but he does not quite claim that these passages directly and unquestionably support his thesis. Instead, he asserts (without actually using the phrase) that his thesis follows by good and necessary consequence from these and other passages.

In this short column, we do not have space to look at every passage cited by Dr. Gross; however, because his basic approach is the same for all passages, looking at just one passage will suffice to show the inadequacy of his argument. For this purpose, let us consider the first Scripture passage he cites, and what he has to say about it.

Acts 2:36-39 reads as follows: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

About this passage, Dr. Gross writes: "The promise offered to those repenting sinners was the promise of salvation. And the same promise was extended to their children, too. ... Was this promise only for *them*? Or does it continue to be in effect today? ... That promise was not only a Jewish promise, confined to those then present. It was a universal promise made to all everywhere whom God would call to salvation. The Gentiles were those who were 'far off' (Eph. 2:13,17), and so the promise is for you and me just as much as for those who first heard it."

These words reveal three errors that Dr. Gross makes throughout his book: (1) assuming that whenever the Scripture speaks of children, it means *all* children; (2) ignoring qualifying text within a passage; and (3) failing to recognize that his own interpretations are fatal to his thesis. Although only the third of these errors is specifically a question of logic (the first two are primarily hermeneutical questions), I'll address each briefly.

First, for Peter's words to support Dr. Gross' assertions, it is necessary that they be read as, "... the promise is for you and for each and every one of your children ...." To read the passage in this way is to

make the same error that many Jews did in thinking that God's covenant with Abraham insured the salavation of every child born to Jewish parents. The natural and orthodox understanding of Peter's words is that that the promise continues from generation to generation, in the same way as God's previous promise to Abraham does.

Second, Dr. Gross ignores the phrase, "as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." Even if "children" means "each and every child", the concluding phrase modifies the otherwise apparent universality of the promise by restricting it to those whom God calls. The promise is not to everyone in each generation, but to everyone God calls to Himself in each generation.

Finally, even if we adopt Dr. Gross' interpretation of "children" ("each and every one of your children"), and even if we ignore the passage's concluding phrase, the passage does not support Dr. Gross' thesis. Recall that his thesis is that every child of faithful Christian parents will be saved. If his interpretation of the passage is correct, then every child of Christian parents --- regardless of whether the parents are faithful --- will be saved; nothing in the passage restricts the promise to faithful parents only. Thus, Dr. Gross' own interpretation of the passage is fatal to his thesis.

Acts 2:36-39 does not support Dr. Gross' thesis. Although I've not shown it here, analysis of the other passages he cites shows that none of them support him, either. Thus, Dr. Gross does not prove that all the children of faithful Christian parents will necessarily go to heaven.

Please note that I have shown only that Dr. Gross has not proved his thesis; I have *not* shown that his thesis *cannot* be true (the thesis cannot be true, but the proof of this is left as an exercise to the reader). *Nor* have I explained what the Scripture does teach about the salvation of believer's children. On this issue, we should take comfort and confidence in the knowledge that God promises to richly bless those who honor Him.

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Necessary Consequence:
Manufactured Meaning
by C. Michael Holloway

The Ten Commandments are meaningless. ...

Now that I have your attention, and before you pick up the phone to charge me with heresy, let me explain. Let's begin with a story.

One of my duties at work is to participate in a group that is developing guidelines for using a certain computer programming language in computer systems that control such things as airplane autopilots. In a meeting of this group last October, we discussed whether the guidelines should contain requirements about what *should* be done, or prohibitions against what *should not* be done. One member of the group, we'll call him Sam, suggested that the guidelines should probably contain both. To support his suggestion, Sam cited the example of the Ten Commandments. He mentioned that the Ten Commandments include both commands about what not to do (Thou shalt not commit adultery), and about what to do (Remember the Sabbath day). He should've stopped there.

But, Sam did not stop there. He went on to suggest that people seem to respond much better to being told what to do than to being told what not to do. "For example," he said, "the command against adultery is one of the most often violated, while the command to remember the Sabbath is the most often obeyed, because almost no one works 7 days a week." To him, each person who takes at least one day a week off from work obeys the fourth commandment, no matter what that person might do on his day off. Although Sam did not say so explicitly, it was clear that he believes that it is possible to obey the fourth commandment and disobey the seventh at the same time.

Sam used the phrase "the Ten Commandments," and he even correctly cited the text of two of them; but had he been citing some obscure passage from the Koran, he would not have been any further away from God's truth than he was. He was far away from the truth, because he *manufactured* his own meaning for the text, instead of *determining* the meaning that God had given to it.

Manufactured meaning is not new. Jesus soundly chastised the religious people of His day for making up their own meanings for many of God's commandments ("You have heard that it was said... But I say to you").

Manufactured meaning is not new, but it is extremely popular today. This popularity is easy to see in the deconstructionist language movement, which asserts that meaning exists only in the eye or ear of the beholder. This popularity is also easy to see in the radical feminist movement, which asserts that not only do words such as chairman, mankind, and person oppress women, but that people come in at least 5 different genders. Finally, this popularity is easy to see among legal theorists who assert that the Constitution means whatever the courts say that it means.

Manufactured meaning is popular in evangelical circles, too. Although we would never claim that *A Tale of Two Cities* was without meaning until we read it, although we could not come up with 5 different genders if our lives depended on it, and although we would never conceive of creating a right to kill unborn children from the Bill of Rights, we will happily talk about what a Scripture passage "means to us." We easily forget that what we think a passage means does not matter one whit, unless it agrees with what God says it means. God has given us much liberty through Christ, but that liberty does not extend to manufacturing meaning for any part of His Word.

To complete the sentence with which I opened this column: The Ten Commandments *are* meaningless ... unless their meaning comes from God Himself, through the Scripture. Consider the two commandments Sam cited in the meeting last October.

Only Scripture can tell us what it means to commit adultery. Some may say that a man commits adultery only if he has sexual relations with someone who is not his wife, but the Scripture says: "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28), and "whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32b).

Only Scripture can tell us what it means to remember the Sabbath day. Refraining from working is certainly a part of it, but it is not the only part, as passages such as Isaiah 58:13, Luke 4:16, and Acts 20:7 make clear.

Of course, this principle applies to all of Scripture, too. Only Scripture can tell us what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. Only Scripture can tell us what it means to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Whenever we resort to manufacturing our own meaning, instead of discerning---through the illumination of the Holy Spirit---God's meaning, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

The principles of logic that we've studied in previous installments of this column, and the ones we'll study in future installments, can help us discern God's meaning, if, and only if, we resist the temptation to manufacture our own meaning for those things we do not like or understand. May God grant us the grace to accept His meaning for His Word.