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http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html

LOGIC – Lesson 16
Modus Ponens, Modus Tollens on "If you believe in Jesus, you will be saved"

In our last two Bible classes, in demonstrating man's "super-natural" (above the natural or material realm) intellective powers and the power of logic in discovering them, I brought up our old "friends," modus ponens and modus tollens. I deliberately used an example that was bound to cause a reaction—which is good if it helps us think more logically about truth.

The hornet's nest I stirred up was when I said it is a logical fallacy to say that "if you believe in Jesus, you are saved" can be converted to "if you do not believe in Jesus, you will not be saved." I pointed out that while it is true because of other passages in the Word of God, strictly speaking it is logical fallacy as stated—to say the first statement can be made into the second statement. God is not glorified by logical fallacies. In this lesson, I would like to review this logic, which undergirds the entire Word of God. It is blasphemous to think that God or His word is ever irrational or illogical.

First, let's take a look at modus ponens, which term means "mode of affirming." This is a hypothetical syllogism and it is often found in two forms: one is valid and one is invalid. These syllogisms are written out in symbolic logic: $P>Q$ = If P (antecedent), then Q (consequent). The only valid form of modus ponens is affirming the antecedent (P). This is because P refers to an antecedent sufficient condition. If we have the sufficient antecedent condition for Q, then the consequent Q must exist.

Let's take a look at the statement, "P (if you believe in Jesus), then ($>$) Q (you are saved); P (you believe in Jesus), therefore, Q (you are saved)." Look at the power of this modus ponens. It says that P is the sufficient condition for salvation: faith alone in Christ alone. Nothing else is needed: not baptism, not good works, not confession, nothing. P is the sufficient condition. Sufficient means sufficient. Thank God for His grace!

However, there is also an invalid modus ponens. This is when the consequent (Q) is affirmed to get to the antecedent (P). The reason this does not work is because the modus ponens is all about P being the sufficient condition for Q. It does not say anything about Q without P. You cannot affirm Q to get to P: e.g., "you are saved, therefore you believed." While it is true because of many other statements in the Word of God that says you are saved by believing (Eph. 2:8), you cannot logically get there from this FORM.

P=believe in Jesus
Q = saved
> = if . . . then

Valid Modus Ponens (affirming the antecedent, which is P)
P>Q (if you believe in Jesus, then you are saved)
P (you believe in Jesus)
Therefore Q (you are saved)

Invalid Modus Ponens (affirming the consequent, which is Q)
P>Q (if you believe in Jesus, then you are saved)
Q (you are saved)
Therefore, P (you believed in Jesus)

While this conclusion is true, it is only true because of many other passages in the Word of God. It is a logical fallacy (irrational) to get to P by affirming Q.

Now let's move to modus tollens. Modus tollens means "mode of denial." Like the modus ponens, there is a valid and invalid/irrational way of denying.

Valid Modus Tollens (denying the consequent, which is Q)
P>Q (if you believe in Jesus, you are saved)
- Q (you are not saved)
Therefore, - P (therefore, you did not believe in Jesus)

If P is the sufficient condition for Q, and there is no Q (-Q) then P cannot exist (-P).

Invalid ModusTollens (denying the antecedent, which is P)
P>Q (if you believe in Jesus, you are saved)
-P (you do not believe in Jesus)
Therefore, - Q (you are not saved)
You cannot have a syllogism that states that P is a sufficient condition for Q, and then turn round and take away that sufficient condition (-P) and state anything about Q at all. Although the conclusion is true, as it stands this is invalid; it is invalid and thus irrational in form.

So how would one construct a rational, valid argument that states "if you do not believe in Jesus, you are not saved?" There are a multitude of logical, rational ways that are actually based on Scripture, passages in the Bible.

Take John 3:36: "…he who does not believe in the son will burn in Hell [wrath of God will abide on him]"

Syllogism (which we will learn after we have mastered modus ponens and tollens):
(tw = those who)
      All [tw does not believe in the Son] are [tw shall not see life]
      All [tw shall not see life] are [tw will burn in Hell]
      All [tw does not believe in the Son] are [tw will burn in Hell]

      From this, one could form a modus ponens. Note that P can include a negative proposition:

P [if anyone who does not believe in Jesus]
Q [he will burn in Hell]

P > Q (if anyone does not believe in Jesus, he will burn in Hell)
 P [he does not believe in Jesus]
Therefore, Q (he will burn in Hell)

      Dear FBC family, understanding these things is not an idle exercise in intellective arrogance. Understanding the basic concepts of logic is critical to where we are headed at Faith Bible Church. My goal is to ground us in logic in four areas: modus ponens, modus tollens, the ability to put any sentence in logical format, and construct a valid syllogism. Logic is not just what sounds right or fits our viewpoint. I believe that FBC is filled with rational believers, but look how difficult it was to accept what is true and logical about an irrational/invalid modus tollens. We make thousands of decisions about what the Bible teaches; we must increasingly become rational, spirit-filled people of truth. Faith without rationality always leads to superstition. Always! We cannot afford to follow the direction of our irrational society or Christendom.

      It is truth that is going to get us into the core of metaphysical reality of God and the Bible. The way it is now, to some extent, you are very vulnerable in that you have to depend upon a pastor-teacher—and most pastors depend upon unbelievers who write lexicons filled with naturalistic metaphysics. You should never have to trust any man for certain critical, eternal truths. This shouldn't be. How would you know that your pastor is teaching you the truth? Because it sounds good? Because it feels good? Because it took care of your problem? Because you like his personality? What if I told you that by getting logic and a bit more metaphysics, you can penetrate deeper into the realities of the Word of God than if you knew the original languages. That's right. If you get the logic and the metaphysics you will be able to see deeper than almost any modern pastor or lexicographer. You will actually know why a Greek or Hebrew word is translated in so many ways, because you will be able to see the core reality that that word is pointing to. The word does not carry the meaning, it points to metaphysical realities.

I know sometimes it is difficult to understand the what and whys of logic. This is partly due because of our current anti-intellectual, vegetative culture. Stick with it and you will go from being a person who had to trust what just sounds right to a person with conviction based on rational certainty. Don't give up! When you think about it, what alternative is there? You will be using some kind of logic anyway, you may as well learn true logic and enter into total truth, whole truth, and absolute confidence. If you really want truth, you will want the logic. It may not be as fun as Facebook or TV, but it is food for the intellect and will develop your cognitive ability to really understand and be able not only to spot errors, but construct valid syllogisms for all of those doctrines you love so much. Imagine: the ability to penetrate reality beyond the original languages and to be able to spot logical fallacies, even if they come from some of the most respected pastors in the world. Surely, eternal truth is worth the effort. Surely, Christ, the Logos, is worth it☺

Quiz: I John 1:9 says if we confess our sins (P), God will forgive us (Q). This is a modus ponens: P is the sufficient condition for Q, if you have P then you will have Q necessarily. Would it be accurate to say that this verse also means that if you do not confess your sins, God will not forgive you? If I tried to convert 1 John 1:9 into "if you do not confess your sins, God will not forgive you," what would that be valid? Would this be honoring the Word of God or perverting it?

Answer on the next page

Advancing in the Logos,

Pastor Don

Answer: It is invalid/irrational to convert "If you confess your sins, God will forgive you" to "if you do not confess your sins, God will not forgive you." You would be committing an invalid modus tollens—you would be violating the Word of God. You would be adding to the Word of God. You would be perverting God's Word. See how important logic is?

Like with the example of salvation, there are other passages which teach that if you do not confess your sins, God will not provide temporal forgiveness. However, to commit an invalid modus tollens on 1 John 1:9 is pervert God's Word, whether you meant to or not. See how important logic is to being an accurate doctrinal believer?

It really is all about truth☺