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

LOGIC – Lesson 19 Modus Ponens through Scripture

Every Christian who is really interested in Bible doctrine, Truth, should know at least basics of logic, namely modus ponens and modus tollens. Failure to grasp these basics can lead to many logical blunders regarding what the Word of God is actually saying and inferring—thus resulting in false doctrine. To grasp the logic of these basics is to move beyond memorizing or imaging the formulas (e.g., $P \rightarrow Q$, P , therefore Q). In logic you gain critical thinking skills; it is not about memory skills. To “get it” is to be able to understand precisely what Scripture is saying and what it is not saying in over one thousand “if” verses. Of course, you could choose not to learn this and depend upon someone else to think for you, and you could continue making irrational and false statements about the Word of God. However, if you fail to learn these critical thinking skills, on what basis can you criticize the irrationality of modern Christianity or our generation? At least you have this opportunity. As a Christian devoted to Truth, don’t you have more reasons to understand the logic that is absolutely required to accurately understand God’s Word? If logic does not resonate with you, you should ask yourself why that is the case. It may not be as much fun as TV or FaceBook, but it is a hell of a lot more important.

As I mentioned, the most important thing in logic is developing the critical thinking skills that go along with developing logical thinking. You really build mental muscle by doing the exercises. That is why they get easier with practice. Again, it may be helpful to memorize formulas, but it is important to move beyond them to understand accurately what is being said. Take the logic of modus ponens when one says “if P then Q ,” then he is saying *only* that P (antecedent) produces Q (consequent). He is not saying anything more or less: He is not saying that Q produces P ; He is not saying if he does not have a P ($\neg P$), that it produces a $\neg Q$, or anything else. Just because P leads to Q does not mean that Q leads to P . Just because rain (P) results in wet grass (Q), does not mean that if my grass is wet (Q), it must have rained (P). Furthermore, if it did not rain ($\neg P$) does not mean necessarily that my grass will not be wet ($\neg Q$). Perhaps, I have automatic sprinklers. Again, “ $P \rightarrow Q$, P , therefore Q ” only means that if it is the case that P leads to Q , then if I have P , then I will a Q . P therefore Q only means P therefore Q . The logic matches up perfectly with exactly what is said whether it is being said in the Word or anywhere else.

The following five exercises are designed as practice to enable you to so understand modus ponens that it becomes second nature. I have completed the first exercise for an example (in red).

1. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for 1 John 5:14, . . . *if we ask anything according to His will (p), He hears us (q)*:

p=if we ask anything according to His will
q=He hears us [= answers our prayers]

$p > q$

$\underline{*q}$

Therefore, p =Invalid.

Note what John is saying: he is saying that if the believer asks anything according to the will of God, then God will hear Him (=will answer the prayer). This does not mean that because God answers a prayer (Q) that this necessarily means that the prayer was according to His will (P). To say that 1 John 5:14 teaches that because a prayer was answered that that means that it was asked according to His will is distorting the passage. John did not say or infer that. Think about it: He is saying if you pray according to His will, God will answer the prayer. This is assured. There is no question about this. The problem is that you cannot turn the passage around and affirm P by affirming Q. Even if I could not think of an example where God answered a prayer that was not made according to His will, the logic holds because the logic is based on exactly what John is saying—no more and no less. It certainly is possible for God to answer a prayer that was not according to His will. When the reversionistic Israelites asked for God to return them to Egypt, God could have done that even though that was not according to His will. A reversionistic believer could pray for great wealth when it was not God's will because of He knows it would destroy the believer's spiritual life. God could grant wealth to the believer so the believer would learn the hard way the evil of mammonism. Take the coming kingdom mentioned in Matthew 6: We are told to pray for the kingdom to come, this is God's will. Even if every believer from this point forward prayed that the kingdom would not come, don't you think the kingdom is still going to come? I am not trying to belabor the point. I am just saying that we need to be accurate with the Word of God: John is saying if we pray according to God's will, then we can be assured that God will answer the prayer. He is not saying anything more or less. He is not saying that because a prayer is answered by the sovereign God, that necessarily it must have been asked according to His will. Once again, while the examples might help, the key point here is not the examples or counterexamples. The key is sticking with the John's and God's logic embedded in this verse. $P > Q$ does not equal $Q > P$ any more than trying to say that every man is mortal means that every mortal thing is man.

I understand the importance of being in fellowship in prayer and making sure that the prayer is doctrinal. The point above does not violate that principle. The greater points are that God is sovereign and that we cannot violate what His Word explicitly says in this passage. It is dishonoring to do so.

2. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for *Matthew 6:15 "But if you do not forgive men (p), then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (q).*

3. Construct INVALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for *Psalm 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart (p), The Lord will not hear (q);*

4. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for *Deut. 4:29 . . . you will find Him (q) if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul (p).*

5. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for *Romans 8:9, But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (p), he does not belong to Him (q).*

Answers to 2-5 are on the next page

Answers to 2-5

2. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for *Matthew 6:15 "But if you do not forgive men (P), then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Q).*

p=if you do not forgive men

q=your Father will not forgive your transgressions

$p \rightarrow q$

$\neg q$

Therefore, P.

Invalid.

Jesus is only saying if you do not forgive men, then God the Father will not forgive you [temporal forgiveness]. Just because P leads to Q does not mean that Q leads to P. The Father not forgiving your transgressions (Q) could be for many other reasons (other Ps). It is not like not forgiving others is the only sin that can keep a believer out of fellowship.

3. Construct INVALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for *Psalms 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;*

p=If I regard wickedness in my heart

q=the Lord will not hear

$p \rightarrow q$

$\neg q$

Therefore, P. Invalid.

All the psalmist is saying is that if he regards wickedness in his heart (p), then the Lord will not hear him (q) = $P \rightarrow Q$, P, therefore Q. He is not saying that since Lord will not hear him (q) therefore he must be regarding wickedness in his heart (p). $P \rightarrow Q$ does not equal $Q \rightarrow P$. There are a host of other reasons, sins and evil (other Ps), that could be sufficient causes (Ps) that lead to the effect of God not hearing (Q).

4. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Deut. 4:29, "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and *you will find Him (q) if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul (p)*. Note that in this example the conclusion is first in the verse.

p=if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul
q=you will find

$p > q$
 $\frac{*p}{\text{Therefore } Q.}$

Valid. Seeking God with all of your heart and all your soul is a sufficient condition for finding Him.

5. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Romans 8:9, But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

p=anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ
q=he does not belong to Christ

$p > q$
 $\frac{*p}{Q = \text{VALID.}}$

It is a sufficient condition that if anyone in the church age does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, then he does not belong to Jesus Christ—He is not saved.

Logic Matters—because the Word of God and Bible doctrine matters!

Advancing in the logos for the glory of the LOGOS,

Pastor Don