Pastor-teacher Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html

LOGIC – Lesson 20
Modus Ponensing through Scripture

Modus ponens is a wonderful tool for a true doctrinal believer who really is interested in maintaining the integrity of Scripture. It keeps him from unknowingly twisting Scripture. It keeps him from adding or subtracting from what the Bible actually says.

Modus ponens, the mode of affirming, is simply saying that if p then q, so if you have p then you will have q. It is not affirming anything else. It certainly is not saying if you have q then you have p. You cannot convert the passage, you cannot turn it around. Again, if p>q, and you have p, then you will have q. This is pretty straightforward. It does not matter about any other factor as far as that passage is concerned. You cannot switch p>q to q>p, which is what happens if you try to affirm p by affirming q. To try to make p>q mean the same thing as q>p is irrational. Again, p>q only means if I have a p then there will be q. It is not saying that a q means there must be a p. Something else could cause q. Again, it is only saying if p then q. It is not saying anything more or anything less. It is best to concentrate on the logic of this rather than examples of where this may or may not actually be true. Again, the conditional, "If there is a p, then there will be a q" is only affirming the p.

Below are five exercises.

1. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for Psalm 66:18, *if I regard iniquity in my heart (p), He will not hear me [answer my prayers] (q):*

p=if I regard iniquity in my heart
q=He will not hear me [= answer my prayers]

p>q
q
Therefore, p =Invalid.

It is not necessary to find an example of how this is not true. I do not need to find an illustration because in the valid ponens, the passage is only affirming p: if I regard iniquity in my heart (p), then the Lord will not hear me (q). The passage is not saying the reverse: the Lord will not answer my prayers (q) because I regard iniquity in my heart (p). To make it say that is to distort the Word of God. There could be a host of other reasons that God does not answer prayers. In 2 Cor. 12:7-10, God did not answer Paul's prayers (3x), but it was not because he was regarding inquity in his heart. It was because God had better things in store for Paul: spiritual maturity through undeserved and preventative suffering.

2. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for Matthew 9:21, *for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment (p), I shall get well (q)."*

3. Construct INVALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Matthew 11:21, . . . *For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

4. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Matthew 15:14, *…if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."*

5. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Hebrews 13:23, *Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon (p), I shall see you (q).*

Answers to 2-5

2. Construct INVALID modus ponens using symbolic logic for Matthew 9:21, *"If I only touch His garment (p), I shall get well (q)."*

p=if I only touch His garment
q-I shall get well

p>q
q
Therefore p. INVALID.

Explanation. If the passage says if p then q, then it is only saying if p then q. It is not saying if q then p (q>p). It does not matter if we can come up with a case in which it is not true. It is a matter of what is being said. But as far as an example, isn't it possible for her to be healed [get well] apart from touching His garment? Christ could have decided to heal her before even entering into her periphery, like with the Centurion's son. I realize that this is just what she is thinking, but it is a useful illustration: "If I touch His garment (p), I will be healed (q)" is not the same as "If I am healed (q), then I touched His garment (p)." There are a number of ways for her to be healed (q) by the Lord.

3. Construct INVALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Matthew 11:21, . . . *For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you (p), they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes (q).*

p>q
q
Therefore p. INVALID

Explanation. Although we may want to reverse the passage (p>q = q>p), it is irrational to do so. It is a violation of the logic and what Jesus is actually saying to affirm that He also means "if they repented (q), then they would have witnessed same miracles of Christ (p)." Christ is only saying that if His miracles has occurred (p), they would have repented (q). There could have been other causes for their repentance, like God speaking directly to them or a great evangelist or different amount or kind miracles of Christ than what these people witnessed. We have to stay with what Scripture says and not make is say more than it is actually saying. Logic helps us see that p>q does not means q>p—they never have nor never will mean the same thing.

4. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Matthew 15:14, …if a blind man guides a blind man (p), both will fall into a pit (q)."

p>q
p
Therefore q. Valid.

However, we cannot reverse it because there could be other sufficient reasons (p) for them falling into a pit (q).

5. Construct VALID modus ponens form using symbolic logic for Hebrews 13:23, *if he comes soon (p), I shall see you (q).*

p=if he comes
q=I shall see you

p>q
p
Therefore, q. VALID

Note exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying: if he [Timothy] comes soon (p), then he will see them (q). This does not mean if he sees them (q), it is because Timothy has come soon (p). What if Timothy was martyred on the way? One could image many other reasons for him seeing them apart from Timothy coming. All he is saying is that if Timothy does come soon (p), then he will definitely see them (q). He is not saying that he is only going to see them if Timothy comes.

Logic Matters—because God's Holy Word and Bible doctrine matter!

Advancing in the logos for the glory of the LOGOS,

Pastor Don