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

LOGIC – Lesson 24 Pseudo Modus Tollens

It is critical that Christians understand the basics of logic. Without understanding the nature of logic, the believer will distort the Word of God without even realizing it. Without logic, the believer will have to depend upon the pastor to do his thinking for him. Without logic, the believer is totally unequipped to check the doctrines that he is being taught. While the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit is critical for spiritual truth certainties, He never violates logic. It is very easy to deceive ourselves by not really thinking through God's word spiritually and rationally. Because we have an old sin nature, it is extremely easy to make major logical blunders that neither glorify God nor honor His Word.

It is in our rationality that we are most like God. The image of God in us is in our rationality. Due to irrationality, we live in a new age of darkness not only in politics but in Christendom, a darkness that is blinding and smothering Christians. This age of irrationality is not only in liberal churches, I have personally heard many irrational statements by doctrinal believers who are totally unaware of how they are distorting God's truth and Bible doctrine that they say they love so much. Just a little logic would have kept them from making certain false conclusions. There is a great similarity in the mindsets of Christians in the Word of Faith movement who depreciate logic and human reasoning and some doctrinal believers who do the same. This mindset extends not only to their views on the nature of God, but how they use the Word of God. Certainly, the vocabulary is different between the two groups, but the whole approach to the Word of God as truth is very similar. They both believe that the Word of God has a power in itself that they can gain simply by listening and quoting it even if they do not understand it. The Pharisees had the same attitude. They believed that the Word of God was alive and powerful, yet had no clue as to its true meaning. And yes, Christ regularly challenged them using logic and Scripture.

Before we move to what I call pseudo modus tollens, a little review is in order. As we have noted: modus ponens is the mood of affirming where the antecedent (p) is affirmed to affirm (q). Quite simply, if someone says if p leads to q then if you have a p then it will lead to q: If I believe in Jesus (p), then I will be saved (q). I believe in Jesus (p), therefore I am saved (q). In modus ponens one always affirms the antecedent (p). Modus tollens, on the other hand, is the mood of denial. It is the denial of the consequent (q): If p leads to q, and there is no q (=¬q), then there is no p. Again, if p leads to q and there is no q, then there cannot be a p.

Pseudo modus tollens is the denial of the antecedent (p) instead of the consequent (q). Think about the logic here. If I say p leads to q and then turn around and take away the p, then I have taken away the basis for my argument. Again, if I say p leads to q, and then turn around and say there is no p, then how in the world could I say anything about q. If I am going to say anything about q, I am going to have to do it another way. I cannot say p leads to q and then take away p and say anything about q.

A common example of pseudo modus tollens is when believers think that the statement "if you believe in Jesus (p), you will be saved (q)" means the same thing as "if you do not believe in Jesus (-p), then you are not saved (-q)". This is patently false. It logically does not follow to say that p leads to q and then turn around and say there is no p, therefore there is no q.

The reason we know that someone who does not believe is not saved is because of other passages that demonstrate that truth (John 3:36). If it was true that the only statements in the Word of God about salvation was “if you believe in Jesus (p), then you are saved (q)” then you could not logically assert that if you do not believe in Jesus (-p) you are not saved (-q). Furthermore, we know that there are people who do not believe in Jesus (-p), who are saved (q), namely all those who die before the age of accountability.

Exercises on modus tollens. There is nothing like doing logic exercises to develop critical thinking skills. They actually enable us to think more rationally and with more clarity. There is a reason it is difficult at first, but then becomes easier.

1. Construct valid modus tollens using symbolic logic for “If I believe in Jesus (p), then I am saved (q).”

p=if I believe in Jesus
q=I am saved

p>q (if I believe in Jesus, then I am saved)
-q (I am not saved)

Therefore $\neg p$ (I did not believe in Jesus). **VALID.** If it is true that if I am not saved, then necessarily I did not believe in Jesus.

2. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “If I believe in Jesus (p), then I am saved (q).”

3. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “if I trust God, He will provide.”

4. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “if I seek Truth, God will reveal Himself to me.”

Answers to 2-4

2. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “If I believe in Jesus (p), then I am saved (q).”

p=if I believe in Jesus
q=I am saved

p>q (if I believe in Jesus, then I am saved)
-p (I did not believe in Jesus)

Therefore -p (I am not saved). INVALID. This statement is true only because other passages explicitly teach us that those who do not believe in Jesus are not saved (John 3:36). The reason I use this illustration is to demonstrate how easy it is to violate logic. If one says if you have p that will lead to q, he can't say if you do not have p then you do not have a q. Whether I can come up with an example really is irrelevant. Yes, I believe that if someone does not believe in Jesus, then he is not saved, but not based on pseudo modus tollens. I also believe that all children who die before the age of accountability are saved (q) without believing in Jesus (-p).

3. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “if I trust God, He will provide.”

p=if I trust God
q=He will provide

p>q (if I trust God, He will provide)
-p (I did not trust God)

Therefore, -q (He will not provide). INVALID. Just because when I trust God (p), He provides (q), does not mean that if I do not trust God (-p), then He will not provide (-q). This is the same logic as the previous example. But this one is easier to understand for those who understand the unconditional faithfulness of God. The faithfulness of God does not depend upon me trusting Him. The Bible teaches that God is faithful even when I am not faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). However, for those who believe that they can lose their salvation or that their faithfulness determines God's faithfulness, this pseudo modus tollens is as hard for them to accept—as many have trouble with the previous example. Thus, the important of honoring God's Word by treating it rationally regardless of our personal preferences.

4. Construct an invalid modus tollens using symbolic logic on “if I seek Truth, God will reveal Himself to me.”

p=if I seek Truth

q=God will reveal Himself to me

p>q (if I seek Truth, God will reveal Himself to me)

-p (I did not seek Truth)

Therefore, -q (God will not reveal Himself to me). INVALID. Again, one cannot say a p leads to q and then turn around and take away the p (-p) and affirm a -q. It really does not matter if one can come up with an example. The logic is as eternal as God. To even suggest that God or His Word is irrational is blasphemous. To suggest that it is honoring or even okay to be irrational with God’s Word is also blasphemous. If I was really pressed for examples, I would suggest cite Saul of Tarsus who was persecuting Christians (not seeking truth, -p), when God revealed Himself to Him (q). It is possible that one could also illustrate the fact that there were times when Job was not seeking truth and yet God continue to reveal Himself to him. Also, take the case of a reversionistic believer who is absolutely not seeking truth and who dies the sin unto death in the midst of this rejection. The next thing He knows God is revealing Himself to him in a face-to-face relationship.

Logic Matters—because Truth matters!

Advancing in the LOGOS,

Pastor Don