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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 slithy 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. Ecclementalists [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.