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## **Necessary Consequence: From the Scripture** by Michael Holloway

The name for this column comes from Chapter I, Section VI of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which states that "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 ...." In the next several columns, we want to consider in detail what is meant by the phrase "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from the Scripture." In doing so, we'll cover many of the basic principles of logical argument, as well. By the time we've finished examining the phrase, you should be able to confidently explain why statements such as the following are or are not good and necessary consequences of the Scripture:

Regeneration precedes faith.

Jesus is coming back soon.

Immersion in water is the only Scriptural mode of baptism.

Christians are obligated to obey God's Law.

To begin our examination of the phrase, we need to continue the discussion in an earlier column about the basic structure of a logical argument. Recall that a logical argument consists of a series of propositions, and that a proposition is a statement that must be either true or false. To construct an argument, propositions are grouped in such a way that one of them is claimed to follow from the others. The proposition that is affirmed on the basis of the others is called the *conclusion*; the other propositions in the argument are called the *premises*. In the following example, the first two propositions are the premises, and the third proposition is the conclusion:

All men are sinners.

I am a man.

Therefore, I am a sinner.

Of course, most arguments in real life are not written so simply as this example, which means that identifying the premises and conclusions can be more difficult. Although there is no foolproof procedure for identifying premises and conclusions, there are some words and phrases that tend to suggest the presence of one or the other. For example, the following phrases often signify that a conclusion is about to follow: therefore, hence, thus, proves that, as a result, for this reason, which implies that, it follows that, consequently. Similarly, the following phrases often mark the premises of an argument: since, because, for, may be inferred from, as shown by, may be deduced from, follows from.

To test your own ability in this area, read each of the following arguments and for each identify its conclusion and the premises supporting that conclusion.

1. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8, NASB)
2. A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. (Constitution of the United States, Amendment 2)
3. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:16, NASB)
4. In 1972 Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote that "punishment for the sake of retribution is not permissible under the Eighth Amendment." That is absurd. The element of retribution does not make punishment cruel and unusual, it makes punishment intelligible. It distinguishes punishment from therapy. Rehabilitation may be an ancillary result of punishment, but we punish to serve justice, by giving people what they deserve. (George Will, *Newsweek*, 24 May 1982, p. 92)
5. As always, all the issues are ultimately theological. All the problems we encounter--whether issues of crime or morality or economics or the environment or anything else you can imagine--are issues ultimately shaped by our sense of who God is and how we are supposed to live before him. (Joel Belz, "Sociology without theology," *World*, 25 December 1993, p. 3)

Understanding the distinction between conclusions and premises is essential to understanding the meaning of the section of the Westminster Confession about which we are concerned. Recall that Chapter I, Section IV 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 ...."

This phrase means, among other things, that the Scripture contains **all** of the premises that can legitimately be used to reach conclusions about the whole counsel of God. If this section of the Confession is an accurate statement of God's truth about the Bible, which I believe it is, then it has significant practical implications. We will fully explore these implications as we study further in future columns, but I will close this column by briefly illustrating an important one with a personal example.

A few months ago I had a conversation with a fellow believer about the issue of the role of women in the church. In particular, we discussed whether women should be allowed to teach the Scripture to men. In the midst of discussing the germane biblical passages, my friend said, "I know women who are excellent teachers and know more about the Bible than any man; surely they should be able to teach men." My response was, "I know women like that, too, but that is irrelevant to this discussion." My friend didn't understand this response at all, but, anyone reading this column should understand it fully.