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Necessary Consequence: The Limits of Logic by Michael Holloway

Many theological errors result from concentrating on a particular Biblical truth while ignoring other ones. For example, dispensationalism concentrates on the points of discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, and ignores the points of continuity between the Covenants. In contrast, Messianic Judaism tends to concentrate on continuity and to ignore discontinuity. A truly Biblical position must give proper balance to both continuity and discontinuity, for that is what the Bible itself does.

The tendency to imbalance is no less prevalent when it comes to discussions of the proper role of logic and the intellect in a Christian's life. There are many professing Christians today who deprecate the intellect, and claim that we ought to trust our feelings alone. One of the primary reasons for this column is to provide a counterbalance to this erroneous emotionalism. In doing so, however, I do not want to elevate the importance of logic beyond the level at which Scripture places it. Logic is *necessary*, but it is not *sufficient*; it has limits.

Logic cannot convert the unbeliever. Although we are commanded to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15 NKJV), we are also told that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Unbelievers, even highly-trained logicians, when confronted with a logically sound argument for the truth of Christianity will refuse to acknowledge that truth, unless, in Van Til's words, "God pleases by his Spirit to take the scales from his eyes and the mask from his face" (*Christian Apologetics*, p. 65).

In recognizing that logic cannot convert, we need to recognize also the difference between that which is objectively true, and that which is subjectively acceptable to the unbeliever. Christianity *is* objectively true, but an unbeliever is not an objective evaluator. Rather than consider carefully the evidence of the truth of Christianity, the unbeliever will "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). As Thomas Watson wrote, an unbeliever "is no more able to judge sacred things aright than a blind man is to judge colours" (*The Godly Man's Picture*, p. 20).

Some people will acknowledge the accuracy of the preceding two paragraphs, and then conclude that as a result, there is no reason to strive to defend the truth of Christianity. I will leave the refutation of such a conclusion as an exercise to the reader.

Logic cannot resolve every mystery. God has revealed to us everything that we need to know, but He has not revealed to us everything. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Understanding logic is essential in learning about what God has revealed, but it will not help us to penetrate what God has chosen to keep secret.

For example, a good understanding of logic can help us to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in a way that is not contradictory or inconsistent (for an example, see the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter II), but it does not enable us to fully understand God's nature. Likewise, logic can help us to state the doctrines of providence, predestination, and man's responsibility in a consistent and non-contradictory way (*WCF*, Chapters III and V), but it does not allow us to comprehend exactly how all events transpire in accordance with these doctrines.

We must labor to understand as much of God's revelation as we can; "There is no virtue whatever in ignorance, but much virtue in a knowledge of what God has revealed" (*J. Gresham Machen, What is Faith?, p. 160*). Nevertheless, we must remember also that "the plumbline of reason is too short to fathom the deep things of God" (*The Godly Man's Picture, p 27*). We are not God; therefore, our knowledge will never be complete. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts" (*Isaiah 55:8-9*).

Logic cannot replace emotion. We in the Reformed community often lament the tendency of many Christians, especially those within charismatic and pentecostal churches, to always follow their feelings. We rightly assert that the Scripture calls us to be thinking Christians, and to go "to the law and to the testimony" (*Isaiah 8:20*) to discover God's will.

All too often, however, we forget that God created man to both think and to feel. We forget that emotions are not, in themselves, sinful (John 11:35 is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it proves the point conclusively). And, as R. L. Dabney wrote, we "forget that the efficacious movement of the feelings is just as essential a part of a true religious experience, as the illumination of the intellect by divine truth; for indeed, there is not such thing as the implantation of practical principle, or the right decisions of the will, without feeling" (*Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney, Volume 3, p. 1*).

We should not be controlled by our feelings, but neither should we always suppress them, or assume that they are always wrong. Our example is to be Christ, not Spock; we are Christians, not Vulcans. Sometimes God may use our emotions to stimulate us to think further about an issue that we once thought was settled. For example, I had an uneasy feeling about many of the teachings of dispensational theology long before I was able to articulate its errors. Without that uneasy feeling, I probably would not have taken the time to study the issue in depth, and would still be living in ignorance of much of God's truth.

To ignore logic, or to claim that it is irrelevant to Christianity, is to be un-Scriptural. To worship logic, or to claim that it is all there is to Christianity, is to be equally un-Scriptural. Let us pray that God will give us the grace to avoid both errors.