Necessary Consequence:
Will My Children Go To Heaven? (Part 1)
by Michael Holloway

I closed my last column (Vol. 11, No. 6) by giving the following example of an argument that combines modus ponens with a hypothetical syllogism:

> If Joe obeys God's Word, then Joe rears his children in the Lord.
> If Joe rears his children in the Lord, then he will have faithful children.
> Therefore, if Joe obeys God's Word, then he will have faithful children.
> Joe obeys God's Word.
> Therefore, he will have faithful children.

I noted that this argument, assuming that the premises are true, establishes that Joe will have faithful children. And I invited interested readers to provide arguments to demonstrate whether the premises are true, suggesting that any such readers consider cases beyond just the hypothetical Joe.

Apparently, none of our readers were interested, because none have replied to my invitation; however, a recently published book, *Will My Children Go To Heaven?* by Edward N. Gross, directly addresses the relevant issue. In his preface, Dr. Gross writes, "I will show from Scripture that parents can be sure that their children will be saved and go to heaven." A few sentences later, he makes clear that he is not referring to *all* parents, but only to those parents who are "faithful" to fulfil the duties God has given to them. Thus, his conclusion is basically the same as the second premise in our argument; if Dr. Gross proves his conclusion, we can confidently assert that our second premise is also true.   (Of course, if Dr. Gross does not prove his conclusion, this does not necessarily mean that it is false; it means only that *he* has not shown otherwise.)

Does Dr. Gross prove his conclusion? Douglas Jones certainly seems to think so. In his review of the book in *Credenda/Agenda* (Volume 7, Number 4), Jones writes: "The book's main point is to explain and revive the once dominant doctrine of covenantal succession, the view that God has promised salvation to the children of faithful Christian parents. Contrary to the popular view that the children of Christian parents have an ambiguous future, perhaps Christian, perhaps pagan, covenantal succession maintains that the normal course of Christian parenting is to produce and nurture godly offspring and that if the abnormal occurs---faithless children---then the parents bear central responsibility. ... Terrifyingly beautiful truths indeed, and Gross takes the reader very tenderly and soundly through the biblical teaching on the subject. ... The book is intended as a popular, pastoral, nontechnical treatment for parents. I'm aware of several other treatments of this topic in the works, but get this one first."

Although Mr. Jones does not provide a detailed logical analysis of the book, his review shows that he believes Dr. Gross has adequately proven his conclusion by "good and necessary" consequence from Scripture. My decision to purchase the book last September was prompted by this strong endorsement.

After reading and studying the book carefully, I reached two conclusions. First, Dr. Gross *does not* prove his conclusion. Second, a logical analysis of the book would be a good topic for a *Necessary Consequence* column. Once I started to develop the analysis, I quickly reached a third conclusion: one column would not suffice, because the analysis requires a concept we have not covered. The rest of this column introduces the needed concept, which is the distinction between *deductive* and *inductive*

arguments. My analysis of Dr. Gross' arguments will appear, God willing, in a future issue.

All of our discussions in the previous 13 installments of this column have been about deductive arguments. We have seen that a deductive argument is an argument in which the premises are claimed to establish the conclusion without a doubt. We know that the form of a deductive argument determines whether it is valid or invalid. We also know that a sound deductive argument is one that has both a valid form and true premises. The truth of the conclusion of a sound deductive argument is certain.

Inductive arguments are different. Rather than establishing the truth of a conclusion with *certainty*, an inductive argument only establishes the truth of a conclusion with *probability*. We do not speak of the validity or soundness of an inductive argument; we speak of its *strength*. A *strong* inductive argument has high probability that its conclusion is true; a *weak* inductive argument has low probability that its conclusion is true.

Here are three examples of strong inductive arguments:

Greg Maddux is pitching today; therefore, the Braves will win the game.

Children who study Latin score higher on English vocabulary tests than do children who do not study Latin; therefore, studying Latin improves a child's vocabulary.

A large percentage of people who smoke regularly get lung cancer; therefore, if you smoke, you are likely to get lung cancer.

Each of these is an *inductive* argument because its premises do not *guarantee* the truth of its conclusion. Greg Maddux occasionally loses a game. Factors other than studying Latin might account for the differences in vocabulary. Not everyone who smokes gets lung cancer.

Each of these is a *strong* inductive argument, because its premises make the probability high that its conclusion is true. Greg Maddux does not lose often. Many English words come from Latin. A smoker's probability of getting lung cancer is high.

The distinction between an inductive and a deductive argument, and the notion of the strength of an inductive argument will both be important in the upcoming analysis of Dr. Gross' book.

As a final note, some of you may have heard the difference between inductive and deductive arguments explained as follows: deductive arguments go from the general to the specific, while inductive arguments go from the specific to the general. This is itself an inductive definition. It is often true, but not always.