

# ON GOOD AND EVIL

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## PREFACE TO 2002 EDITION

The Bible has much to say on the subject of good and evil. God wants us to recognize good as good, evil as evil, and never confuse the two. Individuals and societies become wicked in the sight of God when they pervert justice and ethics by confusing or even reversing the definitions of good and evil.

The influence of secular culture has become so thorough that many do not even believe in the existence of good and evil. They consider all moral standards to be based on individual preferences or societal factors.

The Bible is against such thinking. As Christians, we must learn to discern and uphold God's standards regarding these issues. The purpose of this book is to assist the reader in gaining the ability to discern good and evil, and even beyond this, to unashamedly love good and hate evil, as the Scriptures command us to do.

In revising the text for this edition of *On Good and Evil*, I have made many changes, primarily to improve the theological precision and to enhance the prose. Some deficiencies inherent in the original edition cannot be remedied without restructuring and rewriting the text, and thus must remain in the work. Nevertheless, the changes that have been made render the present edition of *On Good and Evil* an even more reliable guide to the reader than the original.

## 1. ON GOOD AND EVIL

When we use the words, *good* and *evil* in ordinary speech, we usually have a general idea as to what they mean. One assumes that he knows what he means by these words, and that he does not confuse the two. If something fits his definition of "good," he would not call it "bad," and vice versa.

However, what one considers to be good may not measure up to another's definition of the term, and thus the latter would call bad what the former says is good. Our subjective thinking and viewpoints influence our definitions of good and evil.

Even so, there is usually much agreement concerning our use of these words. If one says that a given individual is "good," another person may often affirm the same. Thus, although our definitions of good may differ, there is often sufficient points of overlapping to the extent that meaningful communication is possible. If our definitions of good and evil are totally subjective and private, the concepts then becomes meaningless, since one's definitions of these terms may not coincide with another's at any point, or points irrelevant to the situation, and one may never know what another means when the words are uttered.

Although our concepts of good and evil are partly subjective, there appears to be some objective standard governing our use of these terms, in such a way that our understanding of these words are not entirely subjective. In other words, our thoughts, speech, and actions implicitly acknowledge the existence of an objective standard of good, even if our explicit definitions and uses of the concepts of good and evil do not always adhere to it.

However, if there is indeed an objective standard of what is good, then our definitions are mistaken to the extent that we deviate from it. Just because there are elements of subjectivity in our definitions of these concepts does not mean that it should be this way. For example, if our definitions of how long an inch should be are different, but there exists an objective standard defining the length of an inch, then our definitions are wrong to the extent that we deviate from this objective definition of an inch.

If there is an objective standard that determines the meaning of goodness, then we should discover what it is, and set forth the method of knowing such a standard of goodness. At this point, we acknowledge that good and evil exist, but we must discover the objective standard of goodness before we may proceed to discuss the nature of the existence of good and evil.

We implicitly acknowledge an objective standard that defines what is good. As Christians, we believe that God had existed before all else, and that he is the creator of all that exists. We also know that he is a "good" God (Psalm 34:8), and therefore he is the one who defines what is good. Romans 1 informs us that an innate knowledge of God has been placed in the mind of man, and it is from this that we derive a concept of what is good. However,

Paul also tell us that sin distorts the knowledge of God in our minds, which explains the lack of agreement in defining good and evil.

To overcome the effects of sin on the mind, God conveys his thoughts to us by verbal revelation, and thus Scripture is the objective standard of goodness. Since the Bible is what God has revealed to us, it is what God is telling us. If God is the one who determines what is good, and the contents of the Bible is what God is communicating to us, then whatever God says is good in the Bible is good. In other words, whatever God decides to be good is good, and he tells us what he has decided to be good through the Scripture. Therefore, our objective standard for determining what is good is the Bible.

We may then wonder how God decides what is good. If whatever God has decided to be good is good, then it seems possible for goodness to be different from the way it is currently defined. If love is good simply because God has made it so, then it may be possible that God could have considered hate to be good, and it would be so. If this is the case, then it seems that the definition of goodness is arbitrary, not necessary.

On the other hand, if there is an objective standard of goodness on which God bases his definition of what is good, then it would imply that God is subject to a standard of goodness external to himself. This would imply that he does not have absolute authority over the universe.

Based on the above considerations, it seems that the definition of goodness is either arbitrary, or that God is subservient to something beyond himself, at least on this matter of what constitutes goodness. The latter view is unacceptable; the former view is not to be dismissed, and will be discussed further below.

What the Bible teaches is that that goodness is inherent in God's nature, and therefore the definition of goodness naturally proceeds from him. This way, God is not subject to some standard of goodness external to himself, and the definition of goodness is not arbitrary in the sense of being meaningless and trivial, but is founded on God's immutable nature. For example, the Bible says that it is good to love. This proceeds from God's nature, since "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

The Bible says that, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It also says that, "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13), but that, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). This means that God's nature is inherently good, and it is the objective standard of goodness on which all judgment on these issues must be based. God is good, and he is the source of all goodness. And even though he is of necessity the ultimate cause of evil, as he is the ultimate cause of everything, there is no evil in him.

Goodness founded on God's nature is necessary and unchangeable. For example, truth is a quality inherent in the divine nature. It is good for us to pursue and tell the truth because it is God's nature to tell the truth. Since truth is God's nature, this is why it is good, since all

that God is, is good. God's commands concerning truthfulness, therefore, are based on his eternal nature. This means that God will never approve of actions such as perjury, or any type of lying as moral (Exodus 20:16; Ephesians 4:25; Revelation 21:8). God's commandments concerning truth are necessary and unchangeable. This type of goodness is founded on God's own nature, and it is immutable, just as God is immutable (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

Now, God defines goodness, and thus what he is and does is *ipso facto* good. Whatever he is and whatever he does is good, which means that no standard of goodness external to God may be used to judge an act of God as good or evil. We derive the very definition of goodness from what God is and does.

As mentioned, we discover what is good or moral through the Scripture. And earlier it is said that the view saying that the definition of goodness is in a sense arbitrary cannot be dismissed. For example, it was good for Old Testament believers to be circumcised solely because God had commanded it. Therefore, it was good for an Old Testament believer to be circumcised, and evil for him not to be circumcised.

The definition of goodness is therefore "arbitrary," but only in the sense that God's will determines everything, including the standard of goodness. By *arbitrary*, therefore, we do *not* mean, "existing or coming about seemingly at random or by chance or as a capricious and unreasonable act of will," but rather something similar to, "not restrained or limited in the exercise of power: ruling by absolute authority" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*).

The doctrine of the simplicity of God dictates that we regard his attributes as one, which means that there can be no separation between his will and nature. All things, in this sense, are arbitrary but necessary, since there is no explanation to anything more final than to say that God has willed it so, and there is nothing prior to God's will that dictates or influences what he wills. He is love and he wills to be love; he wills to be love and he is love. God's will is the final explanation; there is no prior cause.

Therefore, for one to kill another is not inherently immoral, but is only so due to God's commandment, "You shall not murder." By the same token, it would have been immoral for Abraham to restrain from preparing Isaac for sacrifice, once God has commanded it to be done – in another context, we would call it murder. If God had not stayed Abraham's hand, it would still have been good for him to have killed Isaac – simply because God had commanded it. The justification for capital punishment is likewise derived. God has complete sovereignty over all creation, and whatever he commands is good by definition.

With all this in mind, we are now ready to further discuss the nature of the existence of good and evil. As we have mentioned, we know that good and evil exist, but we are also interested in knowing the form of their existence. This is significant because some religious and philosophical systems assert that there is no such thing as good and evil. Some focus on the non-existence of evil, but affirm the existence of the good. As Christians, then, we should go beyond affirming the existence of good and evil, but also clarify our position as

to the forms of their existence. Christians believe in both the existence of good and evil, but we need to define in what sense we believe that these things exist.

God had existed in eternity; time itself has been created by him. This means that before the creation of the universe, God had existed alone. And since Scripture teaches that there is no evil in God, the question arises as to the source and origin of evil. We cannot say that God himself, although there is no evil in him, committed evil; Scripture denies this possibility. James 1:16-17 tells us, "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." If God is the source of "every good and perfect gift," and "does not change," it means that he does not perform anything other than that which is good.

An answer consistent with the biblical data would be that God had created creatures with the ability to choose, although he possessed complete control over even their wills, and that it was good for him to have done so. But these creatures, by God's good sovereign decree, decided to make choices that were contrary to the goodness of God, and therefore resulted in evil. We must insist, contrary to the "free will" of humanism, that God did not merely "permit" evil, but he decreed it; otherwise, it could not have originated.

Now, the Bible says that if there is no moral law, there would be no sin. Therefore, sin is a transgression of the moral law. Since the moral law states that which is good, evil is thus a deviation from objective goodness, and is therefore not really a thing in itself. What follows from this is that goodness can exist without evil, but evil cannot exist without objective goodness. If evil, as it seems, is an "ought not," then it cannot exist without an "ought." It is possible for there to be an objective standard of goodness without any deviation from it, but it is not possible for there to be a deviation from goodness if the goodness itself is undefined or non-existent.

For example, it is conceivable to have a speed limit without anyone violating it, but it is impossible to violate the speed limit if there is no such thing. Likewise, it is only possible for there to be evil if there is good, but it is possible for there to be good without the existence of evil. God does not need Satan to define him.

Evil indeed exists, but not as a thing in itself; rather, it is a deviation from the good. This does not mean that evil is an illusion, as some non-Christian systems of thought assert, but that it does not have independent and objective existence, as is the case with goodness. In brief, goodness is defined by the word of God, and evil is in turn defined by (the deviation from) goodness. What God says is good, is good; what deviates or contradicts what he says is evil.

The implication is that good and evil are necessarily different. They are not concepts imposed upon a morally neutral world. Some things are indeed good, and some things are indeed evil – the two are not the same. The moral law of God cannot be considered as relative. If it defines a "good" within a category, then anything that deviates from it is evil. Evil is a deviation from good, and a deviation from something cannot be the same as the



thing from which it has deviated. Therefore, good and evil are necessarily different. The Bible instructs us to obey the word of God, and "do not turn from it to the right or to the left" (Joshua 1:7; also Deuteronomy 28:14; Proverbs 4:27).

Not only are good and evil different, but they are against each other. Good does not agree with its deviation, and the deviation from good does not agree with the objective standard of goodness. There can be no agreement between good and evil. As the Scripture says, "...What do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15); "...friendship with the world is hatred toward God...Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). And Jesus himself says, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30).

Something that is evil can never be called good, and something that is good can never be called evil. If there is a speed limit, then all violations of the speed limit are considered violations. It is true that there are differing degrees of deviations from the good (Luke 12:47; Exodus 21:12-13), as is true with speed limit violations. But when we are considering the categories of good and evil themselves, and not merely the degree of proximity to objective goodness, then any deviation from the good belongs to the category of evil, just as any deviation from the speed limit is a speed limit violation.

Given the above, the believer must reject secular theories on the subject, which rebels against the moral law of God and its claim upon their lives. For example, subjectivism states that truth and morality are subject to the individual. He determines what is good and what is evil, and what he decides would be true as far as he is concerned. Relativism asserts that truth and morality are relative to the situation. What is good in one situation may be evil in another. Goodness is relative, and not objective.

These positions presuppose the falsity of the Christian worldview. For their adherents to be consistent, one must not punish another for doing anything against him as long as this other person considers what he is doing as moral, even if it is theft or murder. Otherwise, the subjectivist or relativist would be imposing his own moral standard on another, which means that he considers his own moral standard as objectively true and universally binding – one that should be enforced on those who disagree with him on the subject. This in turn means that their moral standards are objective in nature after all. Subjectivism and relativism are immediately self-refuting when stated. If truth is subjective or relative, then the assertion that truth is subjective or relative in itself is subjective or relative – the assertion self-destructs.

Against these and other oppositions, the Christian position acknowledges that good and evil are real and strictly defined. The lines are very clear, and they are defined by the words of Scripture. To summarize, good and evil are real – they exist. Goodness has real existence in the sense that it is based on the verbal revelation of God in Scripture. Evil, on the other hand, is any deviation from his moral law. If the law of God defines what is the "ought," then evil is any "ought not." We gain knowledge of what is good and evil through the Bible.

That is, through the Scripture, God tells us what is good and what is the deviation of goodness, evil.

The Bible says in Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." The verse warns us to define good and evil as God defines them. We should not confuse the two and pervert his definitions of these two things. If something is good according to God, then we should call it good. We should endorse it, praise it, and pursue it. If something is evil in his eyes, then we should call it as such. We should reject it, attack it, and overcome it.

The Scripture also has something to say regarding the level of understanding we should have on good and evil. The apostle Paul says in Romans 16:19 that we are "to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil." In another place, the Bible records God's attitude toward wicked people, saying, "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good" (Jeremiah 4:22). Wicked men not only do evil, but they also understand it so as to be skillful in their pursuit of it. On the other hand, they are ignorant when it comes to thinking and doing good.

We are not to be skillful in doing wicked things, as is true with those who are "fools," and who are "senseless." Those who are "skillful in doing evil" are said to be "without understanding." Christians are often ridiculed by friends or coworkers when they seem to lack knowledge or experience in secular and sinful activities. These may include alcoholism, drug use, foul language, dishonesty, coarse jesting, theft, and a number of other things. Christians should be confident that they are in the right and the unbelievers are in the wrong. God does not desire us to be knowledgeable in how to live an evil life, although he does want us to be able to recognize evil, so we may shun it. On the other hand, God desires us to be "wise about what is good," so that we may understand and do that which is good. This is pleasing in God's eyes.

In our culture, good is often persecuted as being close-minded and restricting, and evil is often approved as liberating, respectful, and tolerant. The Christian should never compromise God's principles to conform to the world's concept of good and evil, since unbelievers pervert good judgment through their lusts and blatant defiance against God. We should understand good and evil to the extent that we can tell them apart, but we should not understand evil in a way that we are skillful and intelligent in how to pursue it. We should, however, be wise in things that are good so we may be developed in them.

According to the Scripture, not only are we to avoid evil, but we are to be against it – we are to hate it. Romans 12:9 says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." We are to cling, to hold on tight, to what is good, but we are to set ourselves against that which is evil. We must attack it. Another verse in the Bible echoes this thought, but also applies it further to the justice system. It says, "Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts" (Amos 5:15). The secular concepts of unity and love expect us to compromise even God's sense of good and evil, but this should never be done.

So, we are not just to passively prefer good, but we are to actively depart from that which is evil, and actively pursue that which is good. The Scripture says in 1 Peter 3:10-12, "For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'" And in another place, it says, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is" (Amos 5:14). Also, "Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever" (Psalm 37:27).

Turn away, therefore, from that which is evil, and follow that which is good. Good and evil are clearly distinguishable based on the divine precepts recorded in Scripture. This is why God can expect us to see that which is evil, and that which is good, and then make a conscious decision to turn away from evil, and pursue that which is of goodness and peace.

Turning away from evil does not mean that we are to ignore its presence in the world. We are to overcome and to attack it: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Good can always triumph over evil, and right is always more powerful than the wrong. Truth is always more powerful than falsehood. Light is always more powerful than darkness. On the other hand, darkness can never overcome the light. As Christians, we are children of the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5), and therefore we can be confident that if we will stay true to the good, that is, if we will stay faithful to God, we will triumph in this life. As the apostle John says, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5).

Sensing the significance of this issue, it would be natural for one to ask how he may clearly and accurately discern between good and evil. How can we know what God may think of each matter? We have already established the Bible as the objective standard of goodness, and the following will develop several implications of this fact.

Since the objective standard of goodness is the word of God, and evil is meant by whatever deviates from this objective goodness, we know that if we can gain knowledge of the content of divine revelation, we will know what constitutes goodness, and also what is evil.

One of the most relevant and instructive passages of Scripture in this regard is Hebrews 5:12-14: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Now, verse 12 says, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again." The first part states that "by this time" some of the audience of the epistle to the Hebrews "ought to be teachers" – implying that time should be a factor in spiritual growth. This is not to say that

the longer one has been a Christian, the more spiritually mature he is, but that the longer one has been a Christian, the more spiritually mature he ought to be.

Nevertheless, due to his character flaws and negligence, one may remain a spiritual infant despite of having been a Christian for a long time. Therefore, there are those who should be teachers to other believers, seeing that they have been Christians for many years, but they remain as spiritual infants, who "need someone to teach [them] the elementary truths of God's word all over again." Not that they have never been taught the "elementary truths of God's word," but that due to their lack of spiritual growth and aptitude, they need to be taught these things, "all over again."

The next verse says that, "You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness." The previous verse says that the readers had remained as spiritual infants, although they should have been matured enough to be teachers by the time they were reading the epistle, they had not matured to that stage. Therefore, they needed to be treated as spiritual infants, which feed on milk instead of solid food.

Obviously, the writer of the epistle is not referring to physical milk and literal solid food, but is likening the "elementary truths of God's word" to milk, and the more advanced teaching of theology to "solid food." So, there is such a thing as "elementary truths" in the Bible, while others may be considered as intermediate or advanced teachings, or "solid food," suitable for spiritual adults. Those who "[live] on milk" are spiritual infants, characterized by the fact that they are "not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness."

The passage continues to say, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." The mature feeds on solid food. Since we are speaking of the level of truths in the Scripture, this means that spiritual infants feed on milk, or "elementary truths," and the spiritually mature feed on "solid food," or the more advanced teachings of the word of God.

It is the spiritually mature, or those who are feeding on the more advanced truths of the word of God, who have "trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." This has several ramifications for our discussion. First, this means that spiritual infants are not able to "distinguish good from evil," and as we have observed, these are identified by the fact that they are still feeding on spiritual milk, or "elementary truths." Just because a person has been a Christian for many years does not mean that he is spiritually mature. Rather, due to his lack of initiative and negligence, he may need "someone to teach [him] the elementary truths of God's word all over again."

On the other hand, the spiritual adult is one "who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil," meaning that this person constantly works with the word of God, and thereby have trained himself to a point where he can discern what is good and what is evil. Such a person will not confuse the two, and does not pervert good judgment.

The spiritually mature is identified by those who can partake of "solid food," or the mature and advanced contents of God's word.

Therefore, not every Christian can clearly discern good and evil, but only those who are spiritually mature can be trusted in such matters. Spiritual infants are not only unknowledgeable and inexperienced with the word of God, but they are often led by sentimentalities, lusts, emotions, preferences, popular teachings, secular culture, and whichever way the pressure is compelling them. It follows that the judgment of the spiritually immature, defined here as those who have not advanced beyond basic theological studies, is unreliable.

These should take initiative to be trained so that they will eventually be able to discern good and evil. Only then can their judgments be considered trustworthy, and only then can they properly instruct others in the faith. Since those who are not advanced theologically are necessarily immature, it also follows that all anti-intellectualistic Christians are only spiritual infants.

One cannot deprecate the intellect and theological studies, and at the same time be a mature Christian. Those who have many mystical experiences, or are extremely emotional during worship, are often very immature in the faith. This is surely the case if they are still feeding on spiritual milk, and have never moved on to feeding on the solid food of God's word. In other words, we may estimate one's spiritual maturity by observing his spiritual diet. Does he resist theological studies as too "academic" or "intellectual"? Does he insist on remaining with the "simple" and "practical" truths of God's word? Such things are popular to say, but according to the Bible, it reflects spiritual immaturity.

At the same time, this passage tells us how to improve our ability to discern good and evil. We should seek greater biblical knowledge and theological understanding. We should seek to understand more concerning the advanced materials in Scripture. To reject doctrinal studies is self-defeating. If we will pursue knowledge and understanding through the word of God, we will grow to the stage where we will have trained ourselves to distinguish good from evil. Based on this passage, one must admit that one is unprepared to discern good and evil if he is not knowledgeable in the word of God. There is no hiding from this fact – a person is not a spiritual adult if he has never moved beyond an infant's diet.

Since the way to spiritual maturity and discernment is rooted in our knowledge of theology, this is where our strategy should be based on. That is, we need to emphasize doctrinal teaching in the church, in the family, and in our individual lives. We should emphasize not subjective experience or emotionalism, but depth and scope in our understanding of Scripture. Not only does this involve a long process of careful study and reflection, but also a constant awareness and application of the precepts of God. Only then is there hope for a person to become trained by God's word, and thereby become one who is able to discern good and evil.

Ministers are required to emphasize doctrines. They should never compromise with those who enjoy only emotional sermons that are without scriptural and intellectual substance.

The apostle Paul foretold that, "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3).

It is those with "itching ears," and the ministers who accommodate them, that are responsible for the present spiritual and intellectual feebleness in the church. It is no secret that Christians lack scriptural discernment in most areas of their lives; yet, they continue to resist any doctrinal teaching that will help them remedy the situation. They refuse to hear "what the Spirit [is saying] to the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

Jesus has given "some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-15). The minister whom God has called are equipped with special gifts and abilities to educate and train believers so that they "will no longer be infants" who are "blown here and there by every wind of teaching."

Therefore, ministers should be eager to "preach...correct, rebuke...encourage" (2 Timothy 4:2), and "...teach...with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15). They may even need to "rebuke [some] sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). On the other hand, Christians must "Obey [their] leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17). As the apostle states in 1 Timothy 5:17, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Those who are able to preach and teach with doctrinal accuracy and intellectual substance should be considered the most treasured assets in our churches, that is, those who are able to "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).

The best time to begin one's training in righteousness is not just when he is a spiritual infant, but when he is a natural infant. Parents should take up the responsibility of training their children in spiritual things, and help them gain knowledge of the word of God, so that they may learn to discern good and evil, right and wrong, wisdom and foolishness, early in life. It is a pity that many Christian parents, being physical adults, are spiritual infants themselves. They should strive to grow spiritually so that they may take up the spiritual leadership in the home, and not allow secular influence to invade and overcome it.

As the beginning of the book of Proverbs says, "The proverbs...[are] for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young – let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance – for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Proverbs 1:1-8).

The fear of the Lord is the "beginning of knowledge" – not final goal. In another place, the Scriptures say that, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). Reverence and faith toward God is the starting point of a legitimate education. No one is wise, and no one has true knowledge without first having the fear of the Lord. Christians should not let the world convince them that it is foolish to believe in God or to obey his commands.

Paul says concerning those who suppresses their innate knowledge of God and evidence leading to him in creation, that "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). It is not clever to be an atheist; it is not clever to rebel against God; it is not clever to mock those who devote themselves to Christian theology; rather, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Know that there is good, and that there is evil. These two are not the same, and God does not want us to confuse them. He wants us to be able to tell the difference between the two, and to be wise and possess deep insights concerning goodness, but he does not want us to be skillful regarding how to devise and accomplish evil. For such to occur, we must be knowledgeable with the word of God. Ministers who love their congregations should begin emphasizing doctrinal sermons, instead of compromising with those who have "itching ears." Parents who love their children should begin teaching them Christian theology early, because if you will train up a child with a sense of right and wrong based on scriptural revelation, "when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

## 2. ON MENTAL DECEPTION

There has been much discussion on the subject of spiritual warfare in recent years. The following addresses one particular aspect of spiritual warfare that we encounter every day, but at the same time is often neglected. Many Christians who are interested in this subject are not sufficiently aware of this area of spiritual warfare, nor do they understand the attacks constantly being made against them. Naturally, they do not have the biblical strategies to withstand and overcome these attacks.

Spiritual warfare may be distinguished into two types. The first occurs in the "heavenlies," or heavenly places. There is the natural world and the spiritual world. Human beings exist and live in the natural world, and spiritual beings such as God, angels, and demons exist in the spiritual world, although they are also very involved in the activities of the natural. By spiritual warfare that occurs in the "heavenlies," we refer to battles done among spiritual beings, such as angels and demons.

The Bible refers to this type of spiritual warfare in a number of places. For example, when Daniel prayed that God would enlighten him concerning his promise, spoken through Jeremiah, of Israel's restoration, God sent the angel Gabriel in response. When Gabriel finally got to Daniel, he explained that he had been hindered by another being, quite possibly a spiritual being hostile to God. He said, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13).

God had answered Daniel on the first day that he had prayed, but the messenger bringing the answer was hindered for twenty-one days by a being who was against God and his purposes. It was due to the help of the angel Michael that Gabriel was able to reach Daniel without additional delay. This paints the picture of a very real struggle in the spiritual world – one side in submission to God, while the other side is hostile to God.

From other parts of Scripture, we understand that the power of God is infinitely greater than that of Satan, and that being so, there is no being that can pose a genuine hindrance to the purposes of God. Even the struggle in the heavenly places, therefore, occur only because God has decreed that it be so, as means by which his plans would be fulfilled. Even Satan's own existence is only due to God's decree; no one can resist or oppose the divine will.

Now, when we become aware of the real struggle that is occurring constantly in the heavenlies – though nothing is beyond God's absolute control – we will be more prone to sense the urgency of intercessory prayer, which is one of the means through which God chooses to accomplish his purposes, even though he needs no one to help or cooperate with him.



The Christian should not be overly anxious about this type of spiritual warfare, as if somehow it is possible for the forces of Satan to overturn God in the spiritual world. The Bible teaches us that all powers and principalities have already been made subject to our Lord Jesus Christ. In the first chapter of Ephesians, we are told that when God raised Jesus from the dead, he "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come," and that God had "placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (Ephesians 1:20-22).

There is no question as to who will win in this battle. Jesus Christ had already gained a decisive victory over the forces of Satan; however, the Bible informs us that Satan will not be permanently bound up until a future time. Therefore, there is still an enemy who we must contend with, but we do so from a place and confidence of victory, and not one of uncertainty and fear.

The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 that, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." We do participate in the fight in the heavenly places, and we do so with the mighty weapons that God has given us. Ephesians 6:13-18 says, "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

God has fully equipped us for this type of spiritual warfare, and we need not fear what Satan can do to attack us. The apostle Paul instructs us "to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil," and "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under [our] feet" (Romans 16:19-20). Romans 8:31 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Having introduced the first type of spiritual warfare, our focus for the rest of this chapter will be on a second type – that is, the battlefield of the mind. But upon closer examination, it becomes clear that all spiritual warfare hinges on the mind; spiritual warfare is intellectual in nature.

Recall the above passage from Ephesians 6, where we are told to be ready to fight against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). Paul also discusses spiritual warfare in another place: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and

every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Instead of opposing "spiritual forces" or evil entities by screaming at the air, which is what much of what passes for "spiritual warfare" amounts to nowadays, Paul places the emphasis on fighting "arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." In the war against evil, we are to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Spiritual warfare is a matter of the intellect, dealing with thoughts and arguments.

Satanic forces are propagators of anti-Christian worldviews, and they use human instruments to spread their ungodly ideas. And thus the battleground is in our minds. The primary weapon used against us is unbiblical argumentation – reasoning leading to conclusions that are hostile to God. Since this strategy seeks to bring men away from the truth, Satan's weapon is therefore deception. Satan has been wielding this favorite weapon of his from the start.

When God created man, he told him, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Then came the devil to tempt the woman:

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"  
The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.  
"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:1-5).

The devil contradicted the word of God, which is truth, and convinced Eve of it. Then Adam also succumbed. This led to the downfall of the human race. When confronted by God concerning this, the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). Our problems are the direct result of our having believed in Satan's lies.

Jesus gave us insight into the nature of Satan when he said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). It is natural and effortless for Satan to deceive, and those who belong to him follow his example. God, on the other hand, is always truthful, and those who belong to him are on the side of truth. Truth is the native language of the regenerate, our instinctive response, while deception is the language of the devil and of those who follow after him. Deception is their primary weapon, and their way of living. If we are aware of Satan's methods and strategies of attacks, we will be more prepared to anticipate and overcome them. As Paul says, "we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11). It is to this end that we will pursue the subject.

Satan is constantly attempting to undermine the integrity of the Christian worldview, and he does so by distorting our thinking. Through various means, he desire to impose upon us false views regarding the nature of God, reality, and the self.

Not every idea about God is correct. God exists in reality in a definite form and a definite way, and any idea of him contradictory to this reality should be considered false. He communicates information about his nature and character to us through the Scripture. The correct concept of God is that he is the triune, self-existent, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, loving, and just creator of the universe. When a person's idea of God does not correspond to this, his entire thinking and perception of reality becomes distorted. It is Satan's strategy to deceive people into adopting a false view of God's nature and character.

God has revealed himself verbally, and the aggregate of these propositions forms a system of thought, or a worldview, which we call Christianity. Since Christianity is the only true worldview, understanding its the nature and doctrines is a necessary basis for our relationship with God. It is impossible to hold to a correct concept of God without at the same time affirming Christianity. For example, the theism of Islam is very different from that which Christianity teaches, and thus one has not arrived at the truth by simply acknowledging theism.

Within the Christian worldview, it is not sufficient simply to affirm a theistic deity, since it is integrity to this system of thought that one understands and believes the historical, christological, and other aspects of biblical teaching. Christianity teaches that man needs salvation, and that he is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. A person who does not understand biblical soteriology cannot help but have a warped sense of reality and an unsuccessful Christian life.

Some perceive Christianity to be unscientific and unintelligent. They think one must deny many legitimate scientific beliefs and findings if he were to believe all the things that the Bible claims to be true. This deception causes people to drift away from authentic Christian beliefs; thus, there are those who call themselves theistic evolutionists, which is biblically impossible. Some desire to maintain their Christian beliefs, but they are unable to deny the charges against their faith, so they simply accept the concept of Christianity as being unscientific and nonsensical, and they make the decision to bear this unnecessary stigma. Their method of counterattack is anti-intellectualism, to put down the place of the intellect, saying that Christianity is beyond knowledge, beyond mental comprehension, and even against reason and evidence.

According to these professing Christians, biblical doctrines seem to contain numerous contradictions and false claims, but these are all irrelevant, since it would be a mistake to use our limited mental capabilities to understand God. This is the effect of Satan having succeeded at deceiving professing Christians in the process of challenging their faith. However, Christianity is not only intellectually defensible, but any honest person, upon examination of the relevant arguments and evidences, must come to the conclusion that Christianity is the only true revelation of the only true God. When Christians abandon the

intellectual arena and retreat into irrationality, they unnecessarily become the laughingstock of the world.

Satan also tries to deceive us regarding structure and operations of society. Secular wisdom informs us that the world's economic system works a certain way, and only adherence to this view can bring financial success. The problem is that their views on how the world operates and what it takes to succeed in it are often unbiblical. The Christian is challenged to either maintain their loyalty to biblical principles, and fail, or compromise and be like the rest of the world, and probably succeed. If Satan can deceive Christians into believing this false dilemma, then the weaker ones among us may be pressured into compromising their biblical values and principles in order to be successful in this world.

Secular wisdom contradicts and competes against God's divine wisdom. In the areas of science, politics, parenting, marriage, education, and all other areas of thought and life the world embraces ideas that are hostile to Christianity. The Christian must realize that biblical principles are God-ordained precepts, and only they are accurate. Believers must be instructed to have confidence in the divine wisdom that God has given through the words of Scripture.

The world, whose thinking has been thoroughly penetrated by Satan, maintains untenable notions concerning epistemology and metaphysics – that is, the theories of knowledge and reality. Our society has great confidence in discovering truth through scientific investigations. Although a discussion on the philosophy of science results in the conclusion that science never discovers truth, but is always tentative and changing, the world's unfounded reliance on a scientific and empirical epistemology results in unbiblical conclusions regarding the whole scope of thought and knowledge. If, for example, Satan can deceive an individual into adopting naturalism as his view of reality – that is, only the material world exists – knowledge itself is destroyed, and ethics becomes meaningless.

Satan is also eager to deceive people concerning anthropology and psychology. He contradicts biblical teaching concerning the nature of man. Thus, many today are convinced that man is essentially good, and that it is through humanistic education that he would reach perfection. Man, according to this false view, can save himself, and he requires no divine intervention. This is contrary to what the Scripture teaches about man. The Bible says that man is essentially wicked, and that he needs a savior who is qualified to pay for his many transgressions.

The devil's strategy is propaganda. Television, movies, music, and even our educational system have been infiltrated with anti-Christian ideas. The world's view of religion, politics, science, history, and other subjects are being bombarded into the minds of those who are under its influence. One child I knew had always been raised as a Christian, believing that God had created everything, and is even now sustaining the universe. He began to deny the biblical teaching of creation at the age of eight or nine, when his school began to teach him the theory of evolution. This, as a result, distorted his concepts of all the areas which we have mentioned, such as the nature of religion, knowledge, reality, and man.

Another way people are deceived is through misinterpreted experiences. But the axiom of the Christian worldview is revelation, not experience. Against the popular but naïve epistemology of empiricism, experience renders knowledge impossible. A false view of science has been the cause of much confusion and deception. One may observe the alleged evidence in support of the theory of evolution, and if the evidence is misinterpreted, may come to the conclusion that evolution is indeed correct in explaining the origin of man. Since this is no place to expound on a proper philosophy of science, we will simply observe that all scientific experimentations and conclusions are governed by prior presuppositions. Science is never the objective and neutral way of discovering truth as many claim.

Regardless of how one has come to be deceived, believing in a false version of God is spiritually destructive. Due to false reasoning and misinterpreted experiences, one may come to a deistic view of the universe. A deist may sense no need to pray or to expect answers to his prayers, even when the Bible says that, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). He may not have a sense of urgency to preach the gospel, telling others to believe and worship God. The deist's salvation and success in this world rests only on himself, since God has left him to his own devices. Ultimately, the principle of the survival of the fittest will hold in such a universe. Divine intervention is out of the question. Human beings must help one another, since God will not help them; thus, deism may also lead one to some form of humanism.

God has not left us defenseless against the devil's strategies of deception. If Satan's weapon of attack is intellectual deception, then our defense and counterattack consist in truth. As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Satan attempts to keep us in bondage to his lies, but we can be set free through the truth that God has revealed to us. To know the truth is to know the thoughts of God.

One's worldview should not merely be a matter of subjective choice or preference. Some beliefs are true, and some beliefs are false. Within the Christian worldview, Scripture is the sole and ultimate test for truth. God has given us a system of truth through the Scripture. Since the Bible is God's revelation, it can never be wrong on any issue that it addresses. A thorough knowledge and understanding of the Scripture, then, is our ultimate safeguard against satanic deception of every kind.

Since the Bible is thoroughly reliable and comprehensive, we do not need other tests for truth, nor are any other tests for truth possible. Now, the test of logic, and specifically the law of noncontradiction, may appear to be a legitimate test for truth, but logic itself is integral to the verbal revelation of God, and thus is not strictly a separate test. Logic is the way that God thinks, and does not exist apart from him. If from our study of the Scripture we arrive at two contradictory propositions, then we will have to conclude that one or both of these are mistaken, and that we need to examine the biblical data again to ensure the proper understanding. In other words, the Christian needs no other test for truth beyond the Scripture.

The world does not accept the authority of Scripture, and because of this some may be tempted to think that there must be other tests for truth that may appeal to the unbeliever. In addition, without other tests for truth, how may an unbeliever come to know any truth at all? But this is what we affirm, that unless one's thinking begins with the whole of Scripture as the infallible truth, no knowledge is possible at all. This is to say that all systems of thought beginning from non-Christian presuppositions fail to make knowledge possible, and thus collapse into total skepticism.

Now, skepticism is self-contradictory, since to say that truth is unknowable is to claim knowledge about the very nature of truth itself. Since all non-Christian worldviews collapse into skepticism, and skepticism is in turn self-contradictory, it follows that all non-Christian worldviews must be abandoned. Having provided elaborate arguments elsewhere to demonstrate this position, we will proceed with the assumption that only Christianity succeeds in securing the possibility of knowledge.

Non-Christians falsely consider the test of experience or observation as the most reliable. Many Christians have been misled on this issue so that they have come to accept this view as true. However, experience or observation is completely unreliable. To say the least, sensations are most subject to misinterpretation, but even prior to that, we may say that on the basis of empiricism, no knowledge at all is possible. It is impossible, by experience, to prove that experience is reliable before experience has first been proved reliable. The empiricist's epistemology runs in a vicious circle. The entire scientific enterprise is subject to this crippling defect, and can produce no legitimate argument against revelation.

Worldly wisdom, which the Bible calls foolish, teaches its followers to depend first on experience or observation as a way to discover truth and reality; it pays its respect, at least on paper, to the role of reason. But it thoroughly ridicules Scripture and revelation. Many Christians have been deceived to adopt this worldly perspective on truth. And thus they look to experience first, which they often misinterpret, then reason, of which they have little, and finally Scripture, of which they are unknowledgeable in regards to its contents and methods of interpretation. Is it any wonder that so many Christians are under the deception of Satan?

Suppose that a Christian desires to break an immoral lifelong habit. He prays long and hard, but finds it impossible to quit. From his experience, he infers that although God may exist, he is not interested in the affairs of man. He has become something of a deist. Afterward, he comes to know a number of individuals who had broken the same habit as a result of their Christian faith. Observing the experiences of others thus destroyed his belief in deism, and now he comes to believe once again in a theistic God – but one who is unjust! Such is the way experience leads; an infinite number of propositions may be derived from a given experience, and there is no way to tell for sure which one is true on the basis of empiricism. Verbal revelation from God is required.

The truth may be that the fault lies with the person, that there is something wrong with him that is not present in these other Christians who managed to stop the habit. Through conclusions formed by misinterpreted experiences, this person had changed his worldview

twice, but never arrived at the truth, that theism is true, and that God is not unjust, but that there is something wrong with him which he must deal with first. It will also be the Scripture that identifies this hindrance.

Let us subject deism to the test of Scripture. We quickly discover that divine revelation rejects it. The Bible teaches that God not only "created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), but since then has been "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). The Bible rejects the view that God has left the universe to run on its own after creation, but it teaches that the very existence and normal operation of the universe is dependent on him: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). The apostle Paul asserts that all of human life and activities reply on God: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

According to the biblical passages cited above, the sustenance of God is necessary for all of human existence. Other biblical indications of God's involvement with human life are his miracles, his proclamations through the prophets, and most important of all, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. The Scripture does not give the idea that God is disinterested, but rather so concerned about us that he took on a human nature in his plans concerning our history and destiny.

Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, performing miracles of healing, forgiving sins, died, and rose from the dead for our redemption. The Bible says that, even now, he is interceding for us at the right hand of God. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." If the above is true, then deism cannot be true.

We may present an *ad hominem* argument against deism; that is, we may show that even on the basis of faulty presuppositions, such as scientific empiricism, theism must be true. We know that the physical universe exists, and that for every effect, or everything that has a beginning, there must be a cause. On the basis of scientific first principles, we may show that the universe has a beginning, which means that it is an effect, and thus must have a cause to explain its existence. Since an infinite regression of causes is not possible, then there must exist a first cause that started it all. Since time itself has a beginning, the first cause must be eternal, meaning that it had always existed, and that it exists outside of time. This first cause has no beginning, but had always been in existence. Therefore, this first cause does not require a cause that precedes it. Since the effect cannot be qualitatively greater than the cause, and the universe contains and reflects intelligence, this first cause must have intelligence.

God has the power of self-existence, meaning that his existence does not depend on anyone or anything, since there was nothing besides him at the beginning. On the other hand, beings in this physical world are dependent beings, meaning that we must rely on other things for our continual existence. These things that we depend on, depend on other things. It is impossible that the elements rely on one another in a way that they form a closed

system, requiring no external involvement, since neither the individual elements nor the sum of the elements have the power of self-existence. Even if the elements form a closed circle – element A dependent on element B, which is dependent on element C, which in turn is dependent on element A – the sum of these elements does not have the power of self-existence, and therefore must require an external element to sustain it.

To summarize, there must be a first cause, and this first cause must be self-existent. The first cause must not be dependent. All created things are not independent, nor are they self-existent, and must ultimately be dependent on something which is independent, and therefore must still be constantly depending on this first cause. This is who we call God.

Now, the self-existence of God is explicitly taught in the Bible: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Only God has the power of existence inherent in his own being; he is not depending on another for his existence. The creation is not this way – it requires the constant sustaining power of God. Therefore, according to the test of Scripture, it would be a mistake to say that God is not involved in human life, since his constant active power of sustenance is required for us to even remain in existence.

Although experience or observation is thoroughly unreliable, and can provide no knowledge of anything whatever, even it may be used to formulate *ad hominem* arguments in favor of the biblical worldview. Experience primarily has to do with the physical world in which we live. Many people come to believe in false ideas due to misinterpreted experiences or observations. If deism means that God is not involved in human affairs, all we have to do to refute it is to show that we have reason to believe that God is in fact involved in our lives, whether we cite examples from the life of the person in question or not. We can document how God has answered some people's prayers, in manners that are not subject to chance or fraud. Having done that, the person in question can no longer use his own experience as proofs in support of deism. If we have evidence to believe that God has even participated in one person's life, then deism is not correct.

There are several strategies that help to prepare one in scriptural discernment. Implementing these strategies will assist one in becoming more able to employ biblical revelation as the test for truth. It is impossible to apply the test of Scripture against a proposition if one does not know what the Bible has to say on the subject. The following procedures will help one move toward the right direction. These are both short-term and long-term strategies that will strengthen a person's ability to discern and expose the lies of the devil.

We recall that Satan's weapon is deception, that the opposite of deception is truth, and that truth is to be our weapon against the deception of Satan. Our knowledge of the truth comes from God's word, and our sole test for truth is Scripture. It follows that we must be knowledgeable when it comes to biblical doctrines. Without a knowledge of sound theology, it is easy for a person to be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).



The strategy of the church against deception is therefore an emphasis on doctrinal teaching. The church should constantly inform and clarify to the people what Christianity affirms through a clear and systematic exposition of the Scripture. Jesus has provided us with ministers to work toward this end. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Paul admonishes Titus that an elder must be one who "hold[s] firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). The minister must "hold firmly" to the apostolic doctrines that, according to Jude, have been "once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude v. 3). He is to implement a two-part procedure to ensure the spiritual safety and growth of the congregation – that is, he must pass on "sound doctrine" as well as be able to "refute those who oppose it." In other words, a minister must be proficient in theology and apologetics, and be able to teach these subjects. One who is able to do this will make clear what Christianity and the world believe, where they differ, and why the former is correct while the latter is not.

Paul repeatedly emphasizes this type of ministry in his letters, and particularly to Timothy and Titus. He wrote to Timothy, saying, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). Ministers are to learn the pure apostolic doctrines, and pass them on, unadulterated, to "reliable men," who will continue to pass them on to future generations. When we do this, the revelation of God will be preserved.

Paul charges Timothy to, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). When people's thoughts and actions are not in agreement with Scripture, preachers are to correct them, rebuke them, and encourage them to follow the truth with "great patience and careful instruction." However, Paul warns that, "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3). The minister often discovers that the enemies to truth are not to be found exclusively among non-Christians, but often among professing Christians in his own congregation.

This should not discourage us from proclaiming and insisting on the exclusive truths of Christianity, but should incite us to boldly "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude v. 3). If, as Paul says, "the church of the living God [is] the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), then no standard of truth exists outside of Christianity, and it is our responsibility to be "the pillar and foundation of the truth" in a society that is hostile to the truth of God.

Paul admonishes Titus, saying, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), and that he must "Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you" (Titus 2:15). Ministers have the God-given authority and duty to encourage belief in the truth, and rebuke the disobedient and unbelieving "with all authority." We are not to "let anyone despise [us]."

The strategy of doctrinal preaching is mainly deployed by ministers of God, but every Christian needs to be involved in that they have the responsibility to learn from them the truths of God, be assured of these truths, and to contemplate their implications. Then, as the opportunity arises, he is to "hold out the word of life" (Philippians 2:16) in this "crooked and depraved generation, in which [we] shine like stars in the universe" (Philippians 2:17). Thus, doctrinal education is our dominant defensive and offensive weapon; it is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). It would be wise for Christians to invest their time, energy, and money in pursuit of theological knowledge.

It is important for us to be aware of our thoughts. Sometimes, especially when we are not socializing with others, we may entertain certain thoughts without translating them into words. For example, if Satan bombards a person with a number of unbiblical ideas, resulting in fear in his mind, he may be gripped by this fear without being aware of what he is fearful about. It is helpful, then, for this person to verbalize his fears so as to make it possible to compare those fear-inducing thoughts with the words of Scripture. This is a strategy of self-awareness – translating our thoughts into words, and then judging them by the Scripture.

Closely connected with verbalization is fellowship with other believers. As mentioned, when we are by ourselves, many thoughts may cross our minds without us putting them into words. Without verbalization, some may accept certain unbiblical ideas without being aware of it. Those who are more knowledgeable and disciplined in this area may not need the constant fellowship of others to achieve awareness, but those who are weaker may need to use their time with other believers to examine what is happening on the inside of them. It is when we translate our thoughts into words that we can evaluate them by the Scripture.

Christians are not to be solely defensive in spiritual warfare, but are expected to actively engage the enemy. Every time a person speaks to someone about Jesus Christ, he is participating in spiritual warfare. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, that, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Every time we preach Jesus Christ, we are doing warfare against the evil one, and the ideas with which he has blinded those who follow him.

This is a war in which we must actively participate, and God has given us the means by which we may gain the victory. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the

weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." We engage in spiritual warfare by the weapons that God has given us. They have "divine power" to "demolish arguments" and to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." We must not avoid spiritual warfare, but rather participate in it bravely and intelligently, both on a personal and global level.

### 3. LOGIC AND FALLACIES

To discern good and evil, one must be able to understand the Scripture, and then apply it to evaluate various arguments that he may encounter. This chapter introduces some of the basic concepts of reasoning. Learning the following materials causes one to become more conscious of the thoughts and ideas he comes across every day, which means that he will be able to protect himself from wrong thinking, and be more prepared to defend correct thinking.

**Definitions.** We should first define several important terms that we will be using repeatedly in this chapter:

*Arguments:* An argument consists of a set of propositions of which one is being asserted as true on the basis of the other propositions. Sometimes an argument may appear as only a single statement. In such cases, the argument may contain assumptions, which if stated explicitly, will form a set of statements corresponding to the above definition.

*Premises:* The premises are the supporting propositions that, when taken together, supposedly lead to the conclusion.

*Conclusion:* The conclusion is the assertion which the argument is supposed to prove on the basis of the premises.

*Validity:* A valid argument is one where the premises lead inevitably to the conclusion. In such an argument, the conclusion must be true provided that the premises are true. However, it is possible for an argument to be valid, yet untrue. If the premises are untrue, but the argument is structured in a way that if they are assumed to be true, would lead inevitably to the conclusion, then the argument would be false, but valid.

We may take the following example to illustrate the words defined above:

1. All dogs are mammals.
2. All mammals are warm-blooded.
3. Therefore, all dogs are warm-blooded.

This set of propositions consists of three statements, of which (3) is asserted as true on the basis of (1) and (2), which makes this set of statements an *argument*. Statements (1) and (2) are the supporting propositions that should logically lead to the conclusion (3), making them the *premises*. The statement being claimed as true is (3), which makes it the *conclusion* of the argument. If the premises, statements (1) and (2), lead inevitably to the conclusion, statement (3), then this argument is said to be a *valid* argument. This means that the conclusion must be true if the premises are true. However, a valid argument is not the same as a *sound*, or true, argument. A valid argument can be untrue. Validity merely indicates whether the premises inevitably lead to the conclusion. The conclusion would be

true if the premises are true. On the other hand, in an invalid argument, the conclusion may not be true even if the premises are true.

I may say:

1. All dogs have five legs.
2. Ralph is a dog.
3. Therefore, Ralph has five legs.

This is a valid argument, since if all dogs indeed have five legs, and if it is also true that Ralph is a dog, then the conclusion that Ralph has five legs is unavoidable. If statements (1) and (2) are true, then (3) has to be true. This is a valid argument, but the conclusion is not true. A valid argument is also true if the premises are true, meaning that the conclusion must be true by logical necessity if the premises are true.

To summarize, an argument is a set of propositions of which one is asserted to be true. The statement asserted to be true is the conclusion, with the remaining statements as the premises, which should lead to the conclusion. The premises lead inevitably to the conclusion if the argument is valid. In a valid argument, the conclusion is true if the premises are true.

**Argument Forms.** The way an argument is structured makes it valid or invalid. Although I will not be covering argument forms extensively in this book, I will introduce several of them, which will be useful for our impending discussion. There are others argument forms than those presented here.

The first argument form is at follows:

1. All A is B.
2. All B is C.
3. Therefore, all A is C.

We are using the letters A, B, and C to represent different words and terms. This is the argument form used in an example above. The argument says:

1. All dogs are mammals.
2. All mammals are warm-blooded.
3. Therefore, all dogs are warm-blooded.

In this case, A stands for *dogs*, B for *mammals*, and C stands for *warm-blooded*. This is a valid argument form, meaning that if an argument follows this structure, it will yield a logically certain conclusion. If premises (1) and (2) are true, then the conclusion (3) must be true.

Another argument form looks like this:

1. If A, then B.
2. A.
3. Therefore, B.

We may expand this slightly to make it clearer:

1. If A is true, then B is true.
2. A is true.
3. Therefore, B is true.

This argument form states as its first premise that, if A is true, then B must be true. If you find the condition A to be present, then there is no possibility for B to be false. Then, (2) tells us that A is indeed true, which makes (3) the necessary conclusion, that B is true. This is a valid argument since, given its structure, the truth of the conclusion is logically unavoidable if the premises are true.

The final argument form that we will examine is called a dilemma. It is stated as follows:

1. Either X or Y.
2. Not X.
3. Therefore, Y.

This argument form can also be expanded and stated as:

1. Either X is true, or Y is true (but not both).
2. X is not true.
3. Therefore, Y is true.

The first premise gives us two possibilities – it states that either X is true, or Y is true, but it is impossible that both are true. The second premise then denies one of the two possibilities, making it logically necessary for the other to be true. If we agree that a person must either be married or unmarried, and that he cannot be both married and unmarried, then if we deny that he is married, he must be unmarried.

**Evaluating Arguments.** With the above in mind, I will now introduce a basic procedure for evaluating arguments. To evaluate an argument is to examine it for the purpose of finding its strength and weaknesses, and whether the argument should be accepted.

Here are the six steps of the strategy for evaluating arguments:

1. Define the topic.
2. Evaluate the conclusion.
3. Evaluate the premises.
4. Evaluate the definitions.
5. Evaluate the argument form.
6. Check for fallacies.

Let us explore the meaning and significance of each step.

(1) *Define the topic.* Whether one is reading a book, watching television, or engaging in a debate with another, the first thing he must do is to define the topic of discussion. This is to answer the question, "What are we talking about?" It may seem obvious that two people cannot have a meaningful conversation unless both are aware of the topic; however, many false agreements and disagreements have resulted from ambiguous definitions of the topics under discussion.

Many times, the participants of a debate may agree or disagree on many essential issues, but if the topic has not been clearly defined, the agreements and disagreements may appear greater than they really are. Much time may be spent in the discussion, and if successful, only leads to a clarification of the topic involved and the basic positions of the two sides. This should have been done at the beginning, so more time and effort can be spent in addressing the points that are truly being disputed.

Sometimes disagreements vanish once the topic has been explicitly defined for both sides of the argument. Of course, many disagreements may remain even after the topic has been made clear, but these are the points that the debate is designed to resolve. Conversely, some who seem to agree at first discover that they strongly disagree after the topic has been clearly defined. For example, some people claim that all religions, or at least two given religions under comparison at the moment, are essentially the same. But the clearer the topics and contents of the issue are defined, the more the disagreements between all religions become apparent.

When evaluating an argument, one must first ascertain the topic that the argument is addressing. If he takes the argument to be referring to something that it is not intended to address, then he may find himself disagreeing with the argument, when he may agree with it if he evaluates it as addressing the topic that it is meant to address. At times, the reverse may occur, so that one may find himself agreeing with an argument, but immediately turns to disagree with it once it is understood. Even if an argument is mistaken, one would not be able to expose its weaknesses if he has misunderstood its purpose.

(2) *Evaluate the conclusion.* Once a person has discovered the topic that the argument in question is addressing, he should look for its conclusion. This is to answer the question, "What is this argument claiming to be true?" He is not yet trying to locate the premises of the argument, or to make a judgment on whether the argument is true. He is only trying to find out what the argument is claiming to be true, whether he agrees with it or not.

The conclusion may not be stated explicitly, but it may be implied. In such a case, one must look at the entire argument to determine what the author or speaker is claiming as true. Sometimes there may appear to be more than one possible conclusion. However, a good author or speaker is usually not ambiguous, and one should be able to discover the conclusion with a high level of accuracy if he will take into account the context within which the argument is found.

Once a person has discovered and understood the conclusion, he may agree or disagree with it, or he may be indecisive concerning the matter. A good argument does not assume that the reader or hearer will always agree, and therefore will provide some supporting statements to endorse the conclusion. These are the premises, which we must look at next.

(3) *Evaluate the premises.* If one rejects the conclusion of an argument, he should be able to state the reason for it. Even if he agrees with the conclusion, it does not mean that the argument is sound. Both he and the person making the argument may be mistaken. Therefore, we need to determine whether we have good reasons for believing the conclusion. To do this, we must look at the premises being presented, which are supposed to lead inevitably to the conclusion.

As with the conclusion, sometimes one or more of the premises are implied. In simple arguments, it is usually obvious what these are, but in more complex arguments, the implied premises may not always be obvious, and it is possible to infer wrong premises from the argument, and thereby doing it injustice. However, as mentioned above, good authors and speakers are unambiguous, and therefore upon examining the context within which the argument is found, one should be able to discover the implied premises with a high level of accuracy.

When searching for the premises in an argument, we are seeking to answer the question, "What reasons are given to support the claim that the conclusion is true?" Having found the explicit or implicit propositions in the argument that will answer this, and one will have located its premises.

Then, one must try to determine whether the premises are true. If the premises are false, the argument may still be valid if the premises lead inevitably to the conclusion when the premises are assumed to be true, only in this case the premises are false. The argument is still valid, but the conclusion will be false; it is a valid but unsound argument.

(4) *Evaluate the definitions.* By now we have extracted the conclusion and the premises from the argument. We must proceed to make sure that the words and terms used are clearly defined and used consistently throughout the argument.

As we have seen, if the topic of the argument is not known, the confusion may result in the two sides mistakenly agreeing or disagreeing with each other, when it may no longer appear this way once the topic has been defined with precision. Once the topic of discussion has been defined, the points of agreement and disagreement will become more obvious, and the discussion may proceed from there with greater productivity.

The meanings of the words and terms within an argument are also important. If their meanings are ambiguous, the hearer may take the argument to mean something other than what the author or speaker intends, or the argument may appear to be sound when it is not. We must ask the question, "Are the meanings of the words and terms clear and consistent throughout the argument?"



Many words have more than one definition, and we need to know which particular meaning is intended within the argument in question. The context of the argument usually restricts the meaning of the words used to eliminate most of their possible meanings. Thus, the reader must seek to determine how the use of the words may fit into the context of the discussion.

After we have determined the definitions of the words and terms, we must examine whether they are being used consistently. Sometimes, a word may carry one meaning at the beginning of the argument, and it may be used again with a different meaning further down, and then the argument proceeds to form what seems to be a valid conclusion. However, if the meaning of the word or term were to remain the same throughout the argument, the conclusion would not follow. In brief, make sure that the author or speaker does not change the meaning of a word or term within an argument.

(5) *Evaluate the argument form.* Assuming that we have understood the conclusion and the premises of an argument, and ensured that the words and terms used are clear and consistent throughout, we are ready to evaluate the argument form.

When evaluating the argument form, we are trying to answer the question, "Do the premises inevitably lead to the conclusion?" This is different from asking, "Can the premises lead to the conclusion?" or, "Is it possible for the conclusion to be true given the premises?" Although these may be helpful, they are not sufficient to help us decide whether we should be convinced by the argument, since an argument that is possibly correct is also possibly wrong, and does not carry sufficient logical force.

However, a valid argument can may only be probably true, and not absolutely true, since the argument is true only if the premises are true. At times, the premises are only probably true, but we have already assessed the strength of the premises in a previous step. If the premises lead inevitably to the conclusion, then it is valid; otherwise, it is invalid.

(6) *Check for fallacies.* By the time one completes the previous step, it is likely that one has already determined the truth or falsehood of an argument. We now finish the procedure by going through a list of fallacies to see if the argument in question has committed one or more of them.

Fallacies are logical errors that some arguments commit, which disqualifies them from being valid or persuasive arguments. Being able to recognize some of the more common ones will enable a person to make useful judgments on the arguments presented to him. I will be introducing a number of fallacies later in this chapter.

To summarize, when we evaluate an argument, we must first be clear about what topic the argument is addressing. Even a strong argument may seem weak to a person who misunderstands its purpose, and vice versa. Then, we must identify what the argument is trying to get us to believe; that is, what the argument is claiming to be true. Regardless of whether we agree with the conclusion or not, we must proceed to locate the reasons or

premises being given to support it, and we must ask ourselves whether they are true. To properly evaluate the premises and the conclusion, we must understand the words being used, and make sure that they carry the same meanings throughout the argument. If the argument follows a structure that makes the conclusion necessarily true, then it must be accepted as true if the premises are true.

We will now examine several arguments using the above procedure, which will clarify the process and the problems involved.

I may say that:

1. If X is a woman, it would have two legs.
2. X has two legs.
3. Therefore, X is a woman.

Even such a simple argument poses several challenges. For example, we encounter ambiguity even in the first step of our procedure, which is to clearly define the topic under discussion. Just because statement (1) says that, "If X is a woman, it would have two legs," does not necessarily mean that the discussion is only about human beings, although this is possible. It is also possible that we are speaking of some X that may not be a human being at all. The conclusion in this argument is clear, that X is asserted to be a woman – a human being who is of the female gender.

Upon examining the premises, we see that this argument is not compelling, in that the premises do not necessarily lead to the conclusion; they leave many possibilities open. For example, a chicken also has two legs, so if X is a chicken, it would also have two legs. A woman cannot also be a chicken, and therefore the argument as proposed fails to establish X as a woman. We may also say that every man has two legs, and therefore X, even if human, can be male and not female. The conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises.

Now let us change the argument into the following

1. If and only if X is a woman, it would have two legs.
2. X has two legs.
3. Therefore, X is a woman.

This is a valid argument, and the conclusion must be true if the premises are true. The first premise says that X can only have two legs if it is a woman. If X has two legs, it must then be a woman. Of course, although the argument is valid in this case, the conclusion is wrong, since premise (1) is wrong. Other beings, such as birds, also have two legs.

As for definitions of words and terms, it seems that they are consistent throughout this argument. The words "woman" and "legs" carry the same meanings from the beginning to the end of this argument. There are no problems in this area.

Let us take *W* to represent "woman," *T* to represent "two legs," and *X* to represent the being whose nature we are trying to determine. We can then put the first version of this argument into:

1. If *W*, then *T*.
2. *T*.
3. Therefore, *W*.

This argument commits the formal fallacy of *affirming the consequent*, where the argument affirms the result of the condition stated in the first premise, but the first premise does not exclude other conditions from producing the same result.

"If *W*, then *T*" is not the same as "If and only if *W*, then *T*." If we take the latter as the first premise of the argument, it would make the argument valid. This is what we have done with the second version of the argument:

1. If and only if *X* is a woman, it would have two legs.
2. *X* has two legs.
3. Therefore, *X* is a woman.

If *X* has two legs, it cannot be anything other than a woman.

In the first version, *X* may or may not be a woman, but we cannot determine that from the argument. This argument fails to persuade us of its conclusion, that *X* is a woman. We know that the argument is probably addressing the topic of the gender of *X*, and the proposed conclusion is that *X* is a woman.

The above is a simple, and perhaps even silly illustration. Most people should be able to tell that the argument is unconvincing immediately. But without knowing the procedure for evaluating arguments, they may not be able to explain why the argument is wrong, and exactly what changes are needed to make it a valid argument. If the argument were to be more complex, the untrained person may not be able to evaluate it at all.

Look at another example:

1. If it rains, the ground will get wet.
2. It is raining.
3. Therefore, the ground is wet.

The topic is whether the ground is wet, and the conclusion states that it is.

The first two premises tell us on what grounds the author of this argument attempts to lead us to his conclusion. Statement (1) states that if it rains, the ground will get wet. This premise may or may not be true. If we are speaking of a particular piece of ground that has a covering, then it may not get wet even if it rains. Assuming that both the speaker and the hearer are thinking of a particular piece of ground that does not have a covering, then we

may safely assume that the first premise is true. Beyond this, we must also agree on the location where the rain may fall, since rain in one part of the world will not get a piece of ground in another part of the world wet. So, we assume that we are speaking of a particular piece of ground, with the first premise stating that if rain falls from above this piece of ground, then it will become wet.

The second premise then affirms that, "It is raining." For our purposes, the second premise may also be "It is rained." If we take the latter as our second premise, then we must assume that the rain had not occurred so long before the argument is set forth that by this time the ground is already dry. We may assume that the argument is made immediately after the rain had stopped, or as it is raining.

If we understand the premises in the ways stated above, then it seems the inevitable conclusion is that the ground is presently wet, and not dry. This is a valid argument. It takes the argument form that we have examined earlier, namely:

1. If A, then B.
2. A.
3. Therefore, B.

The definitions of the words and terms such as "raining," "ground," and "wet" seem to be clear and consistent throughout this argument. In everyday situations, the definitions used by the speaker and the hearer in this case should be quite similar. For the sake of precision, we had to clarify the word "ground" to mean a piece of ground without any covering, and that the "raining" occurs above the "ground." The argument is set forth right after the rain, or as it is raining. We have not clearly defined the word "wet," which for different people, can mean either "moist" or "drenched."

It may seem excessive to scrutinize a simple argument this way. This may be true if we are dealing with an unimportant situation in which the truth of the argument does not matter. However, when we come to theology, ethics, science, history, and other important areas, we will need to be more careful in how we use arguments. There are a number of ways to misunderstand even the simplest of arguments. We may not consider the above example ambiguous, but the arguments we hear are not always clear, nor do we always grasp the intended meaning of the speaker. Ambiguity poses a great hurdle to communication, and it does not only occur in technical arguments.

Next, we will look at an argument whose premises and conclusions are implied. The argument is short, and it goes like this: "If you are a man, why are you crying?" At first glance, there seems to be no conclusion. Since it is stated as a question, some may not even consider it an argument. Depending on the tone and the context of the statement, it may indeed be a question. However, assuming that it is meant to be a statement, the topic would be whether the person being addressed is "a man," and the implied conclusion would be "You are not a man."

The premises are also implied. The first premise may be, "If you are a man, you would not be crying" and the second premise is clearer, which is, "You are crying." The entire argument, when stated explicitly, would be as follows:

1. If you are a man, you would not be crying.
2. You are crying.
3. Therefore, you are not a man.

The argument as it stands does not seem to be true. The first premise states that if the hearer is a man, then he would not be crying. Our first reaction is to reject this premise, and thus the proposed conclusion does not follow. If the author or speaker insists on the first premise, then the burden of proof is on him to convince the audience of its truth.

The words and terms of this argument are ambiguous. When the speaker says, "If you are a man," is he referring to a male human being, or the character of a person, as in being "manly"? Also, the word "man" in the conclusion may carry a different meaning. Thus, one version of this argument may be:

1. If you are a male human being, you would not be crying.
2. You are crying.
3. Therefore, you are not a male human being.

We will call this version A. Another version may say:

1. If you are a male human being, you would not be crying.
2. You are crying.
3. Therefore, you are not manly.

We will call this version B.

Version A is correct if the first premise is correct. We may reject this argument if we have reason to believe that this first premise is untrue; that is, real male human beings may cry. The conclusion in version B may or may not be correct, but since the word "man" is used with a different meaning in the conclusion as when it is used in the first premise, the conclusion does not follow from the premises, whether it is true or not. In any case, we may once again reject premise (1), seeing how it is untrue concerning male human beings.

We can create other versions of this argument if we alter the definitions of the word "man." The word can mean "not manly" in both premise (1) and the conclusion, in which case we may have the best possible version this argument, whether the conclusion is true or not. Or, we may have the first instance of the word "man" to mean "manly" and then have it to mean male human beings in the conclusion. This yields another poor argument. Even in a simple argument as this, ambiguity and inconsistency can cause many problems, and the problem is even greater with more complex arguments.

The argument takes the form of:

1. If X, then Y.
2. Not Y.
3. Therefore, not X.

"Not crying" is represented by Y, although it has the word "not" in it; therefore, "not Y" would mean "crying." This argument denies the result of the condition in the first premise; *denying the consequent* forms a valid argument.

Although this argument does not state the conclusion or the premises explicitly, these elements are still present. Some arguments may be as long as several paragraphs with the conclusion and premises implied, instead of explicitly stated.

We will study one more example before discussing logical fallacies. It is as follows:

1. If I hit Tom, he will be injured.
2. Tom is injured.
3. Therefore, I had hit Tom.

The topic is whether I had hit Tom; this is what the argument is designed to determine. The conclusion states that I had indeed hit him. Do the premises support this conclusion? The first premise states that "If I hit Tom, he will be injured." There is no possibility of me hitting Tom and him not being injured. In other words, if I were to hit Tom, there is a hundred percent chance that Tom will be injured. The premise leaves no possibility for alternatives. The second premise states that Tom has been injured. The words and terms seem to be clear and consistent throughout this argument, assuming that the speaker and the hearer do not have different definitions on the concepts of hitting and being injured.

Some may conclude that it logically follows that I had hit Tom; however, the first premise does not eliminate the possibility of Tom being injured by some other means. Tom may have fallen down the stairs, or someone else may have injured him. Therefore, the premises given are insufficient to conclude that I was the one who had caused his injury. It is a possible conclusion, but not a necessary one.

The argument takes the form:

1. If A, then B.
2. B.
3. Therefore, A.

This affirms the consequent and generates an invalid argument. It ignores alternative explanations.

If we were to change this argument into a valid one, we may alter the first premise so that the argument says:

1. If and only if I hit Tom, he will be injured.
2. Tom is injured.
3. Therefore, I had hit Tom.

Given that the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. The first premise affirms that I am the only one who could to injure Tom; therefore, if Tom is injured, it must mean that I had hit him.

To summarize our suggested procedure for evaluating an argument, we go through these six steps: (1) Define the topic; that is, to ask the question, "What are we talking about?" (2) Evaluate the conclusion; that is, to ask the question, "What is this argument claiming to be true?" (3) Evaluate the premises; that is, to ask the question, "What reasons are given to support the claim that the conclusion is true?" (4) Evaluate the definitions; that is, to ask the question, "Are the meanings of the words and terms clear and consistent throughout the argument?" (5) Evaluate the argument form; that is, to ask the question, "Do the premises inevitably lead to the conclusion?" (6) Check for fallacies.

To form a good argument, one applies these steps when constructing his case. He should first clearly define the topic, or the issue that his argument intends to resolve. Then, he must state the conclusion with precision. After this, he should provide reasons, or premises, to support it. The premises must be related in such a way that they inevitably lead to the conclusion which he asserts. He must make sure that he is using the words and terms clearly and consistently throughout the argument, and that he avoids ambiguity. Then, one should check to see if his argument has committed any logical fallacies. Having done this in constructing his case, it is likely that the resulting argument will be a strong one.

There is no need to always state an argument in a rigid or point-by-point manner, although that is the clearest way. In a situation where one's prose demands a more fluid expression, he may phrase his argument in a way that reflects good writing style, yet retains clarity and logical force. One must see to it that it is not difficult or even impossible to find the conclusion and premises, and that he does not alter the meanings of the terms being used in the middle of an argument.

Now that the reader has learned some basic principles in examining and forming arguments, I will introduce a number of common fallacies. Where possible and convenient, I will also provide some examples that may resemble what one may sometimes encounter as a Christian. Non-Christians often argue against Christianity fallaciously. If the Christian is aware of this, he will be in a better position to refute them.

**Types of Fallacies.** There are two types of fallacies, and we will only be discussing fallacies that fall under one of the two types. *Formal fallacies* are more concerned with the structure of the argument than the content. As mentioned, an argument may be valid in terms of structure, but may turn out to be false when the contents are taken into account. On the other hand, if the structure of the argument is invalid – if it commits a formal fallacy – then the conclusion of the argument does not follow from the premises, meaning that the argument should be rejected.

To illustrate a formal fallacy, we will revisit the argument we have just examined above. Once again, the argument goes:

1. If I hit Tom, he will be injured.
2. Tom is injured.
3. Therefore, I had hit Tom.

In terms of argument structure, it may look like this:

1. If A, then B.
2. B.
3. Therefore, A.

The second premise affirms the consequent as listed in the first premise. Affirming the consequent, unless the first premise says, "if and only if," instead of just "if," ignores other possible causes that may lead to B. In other words, C and D (not mentioned in the argument) may also lead to B, and not just A; therefore, affirming B does not necessarily imply A. This argument contains a formal fallacy; it is fallacious based on its invalid structure.

In this chapter, we will only be studying *informal fallacies*. While formal fallacies are concerned with the validity of the argument, informal fallacies takes the contents of the argument into account.

**Some Common Fallacies.** The following are twenty-six informal fallacies that regularly appear in arguments. Knowing how to recognize them will equip one to debate others, and to protect himself from being affected by false ideas, theological or otherwise. There are other informal fallacies other than those I have listed below. Some logic textbooks may list forty-five fallacies, or even up to sixty.

A given action within the context of argumentation may be called a *move*, and the following fallacies may be considered as illegitimate moves in argumentation. I will use this term at times when referring to them. Some of the following examples may be related to more than one fallacy, but each will be seen in light of the one under discussion. To keep this chapter brief, I will define the fallacies, but will not provide examples for all of them. As will be noted in the following explanation of informal fallacies, some of these moves in argumentation are only fallacious within certain contexts.

*Appeal to Authority.* The appeal to authority cites a prominent figure or source in support of its assertion. It becomes an informal fallacy when this authority is an expert in an unrelated field. It would be a mistake to quote a physicist on the subject of economics, as if he is an expert in the latter field also, and it would be a mistake to quote an expert in biology on religion. Many are ignorant when it comes to areas unrelated to their expertise, and their views on those subjects are often inferior to even the mediocre practitioners of those fields.



Often, the views of celebrities such as movie stars or singers are cited on subjects such as religion, science, politics, and economics. Assuming that they have no relevant training or qualifications, what they think on a given topic may be a matter of interest to some, but carries no persuasive power when it comes to argumentation.

An authority is not always correct, even in the field in which he is an expert. Although citing an authority on a related topic may not be a fallacy in the sense that it does make the speaker's argument more credible, the argument may still be incorrect. Both the speaker and the authority being cited may be wrong. In serious discussions, it is best not to rest the whole case on the testimonies of authoritative figures alone.

When defending the faith, the believer demonstrates that the entire Christian worldview must be presupposed for knowledge and intelligibility to be possible, and that the authority of Scripture, being the word of God, is our self-attesting first principle. Appealing to the authority of Scripture, therefore, is not a fallacy, since it is the ultimate authority, with nothing higher or prior to authenticate its truth. The task of apologetics involves articulating and defending this point.

*Appeal to Force.* This fallacy uses threats to persuade the opposition to perform an action or to adopt a certain position. It attempts to convince through the threat of ill consequences instead of logical reasoning. Not only may a threat take the form of physical violence, but it may also be one that pertains to finances or social relationships. The threat of ostracism would be a threat belonging to the latter category. It may often be successful in dominating the situation, but not in achieving intellectual persuasion.

Some may use this move in argumentation for several reasons. The speaker may be at a loss over what rational grounds there are to persuade the other to take his position. Or, it may seem to the speaker that it would be quicker and more convenient to threaten the other, instead of patiently dialoging with him.

*Appeal to Future Evidence.* When one appeals to future evidence, one is saying that although the currently available evidence does not, or is insufficient to, substantiate the speaker's view, future findings will vindicate his claims. It usually carries little logical force, since the truth of this prediction cannot be known until a future time, meaning that there is no real basis to accept the speaker's argument at the present.

However, if there has been a number of discoveries that point toward a definite direction, making it likely for a certain view to be confirmed based on future evidence that may surface, then this move should not be considered a fallacy. Nevertheless, the argument still cannot be proven as true based on evidence not immediately available.

When debating the subject of man's origin, evolutionists often commit this fallacy by saying that future discoveries of fossil records or other findings will confirm the theory of evolution. But based on the evidence we have at this point, it is not likely that future evidence will confirm evolution. It seems that the more evidence we discover, the more

improbable evolution appears. Therefore, the appeal to future evidence by the evolutionist should be considered a fallacy. In any case, this move should be used sparingly in argumentation, if at all.

*Appeal to Ignorance.* A person is appealing to ignorance when he insists that his position is true on the basis that his opponent cannot disprove it. Some beliefs cannot be proven false, but that does not mean they are true. Perhaps the speaker is merely facing an opponent who does not have the resource, training, or intelligence to disprove his position, but that in itself does not imply that the speaker is correct. True beliefs cannot be proven false, but what cannot be proven false should not automatically be accepted as true.

*Appeal to Popular Opinion.* This common fallacy attempts to establish its position as credible on the basis that it is accepted by many individuals, or even by the majority. We live in a confused, irrational, and foolish generation. For example, many college students would take pride in presenting themselves as independent thinkers (while even the value of being such has been taught to them by others), but in argumentation and discussions, they would just as quickly appeal to popular opinion as a way to strengthen their positions.

This move is a fallacy because the majority may be wrong. When it comes to certain subjects, the majority may be more often wrong than right. Therefore, just because a position is held by the majority proves nothing about the truth of a position, except the fact that it is held by the majority.

This move in argumentation may have the effect of putting pressure on the hearer to accept the proposed assertion, one that is supposedly believed by the majority. By rejecting the speaker's position, the hearer risks isolating himself intellectually and socially. The appeal to popular opinion wields more emotional pressure than logical force.

*Appeal to Popular Practice.* This is the "everybody does it" fallacy. Similar to the appeal to popular opinion, it judges what is good or right based on the disposition of the majority. If the majority does something, or does something a certain way, then according to this fallacy, it adds credibility to the practice.

The appeal to popular practice suffers the same criticisms as the appeal to popular opinion in that the majority may be wrong. In most arguments, the majority disposition should not be taken too seriously. However, in some discussions, popular beliefs may add some credibility to a position – it depends on what the argument is about.

*Appeal to Popular Sayings.* This fallacy appeals to popular sayings to form one or more of the premises in an argument. Statements such as "No pain, no gain," "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," "To err is human," "Seeing is believing," "Action speaks louder than words," and "A picture is worth a thousand words" are unproven, ambiguous, and often foolish statements that cannot contribute to rational discussions.

One must learn to question these popular sayings. Is it always true that when no pain is experienced, there is never any gain? Is it true that power corrupts everyone? Can we prove

that everyone who has ever had any power was corrupted? Where is the evidence for this? "Seeing is believing" is an epistemological belief policy, not a statement of fact. In what way is a picture worth more than a thousand words? Can we abridge our dictionaries, encyclopedias, English literature anthologies, or even the Bible, by turning them all into picture books, and still retain the same amount of information, with the same level of precision?

These are statements that may not be meant for literal and universal application, so the above may seem unfair; however, many people use such popular sayings as if they can be interpreted this way, and as if they are in the same category with established truths. When dealing with them, we will need to challenge the premises by asking questions similar to the above.

A statement such as "No pain, no gain" is only an observation that seems to be true in some highly specific situations. There may be numerous instances where much gain is achieved without any pain whatever, so it is foolish to use such a statement in a way such as this:

1. "No pain, no gain."
2. You are not experiencing any pain.
3. Therefore, you will not obtain any gain.

As ridiculous as this sounds, many people argue this way, even within the context of serious discussions and debates. Furthermore, many popular sayings contradict other popular sayings, and they cannot all be correct or applicable.

*Appeal to Pity.* The appeal to pity is especially vile and dishonest. The speaker attempts to focus the attention on the plight and desperation that he or others exist under, not in the attempt establish the rational credibility of his position, but in the to sway the emotions of the opponent or the audience, gain their pity, and thus gain the advantage in the debate. This type of argument is used frequently, and in all types of situations – from personal relationships to occasions such as political negotiations between two nations. Sometimes, a strong party who is not especially at a disadvantage may play the victim, or the "underdog," in order to induce guilt and pity in the opponent or audience.

A person committing this fallacy does not attempt to reason, but to manipulate. A mother may attempt to stir up guilt in her son by telling him how much she has sacrificed for him, and how much she cares for him. If whether this is true has little relevance to the topic under discussion, then this is not an attempt to dialogue, but to control and suppress the other.

Christians often encounter appeals to pity. The Bible teaches that we are to walk in love, and that we should not be without pity for other people. Knowing part of what it teaches, unbelievers, and often even professing Christians, attempt to exploit our faith to their advantage. However, besides teaching us to be "harmless as doves," the Bible also admonishes us to be "wise as serpents" (Matthew 10:16).

A Christian may confront an unbeliever on a particular sin. The latter may say that even though he may be wrong (sometimes they may not admit that), the Christian is commanded to "love" him, and therefore should tolerate his behavior. At times, an unbeliever who is not pleased with a Christian's behavior, even when the Christian is in the right, may take initiative against him by accusing him of being hypocritical for not walking in love. The Christian who does not know the Bible too much more than his accuser may succumb to this deception and surrender.

This strategy is an immoral, irrational, and manipulative move, and we should not be overcome by it. Love, when used in this context, is falsely defined as being polite, soft-spoken, obedient, compromising, and non-confrontational; whereas, according to the Bible, the very act of confronting sin may be an act of love. The Scripture says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love" (Proverbs 27:5), and that we should speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). We are instructed to, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them" (Ephesians 5:10-11).

Even professing Christians manipulate other believers through twisting the biblical teaching on love, but we are only obligated to walk in love on God's terms, not on the terms of those who distort the Scripture in the attempt to control us. We are not to let others make fools of Christians by letting them rob us of our energy, time, and money through deception. We are to exercise wisdom and healthy skepticism when being confronted with a need.

An appeal to pity may take the form of: "You Christians are supposed to walk in love. Don't you love me? Why are you speaking to me this way?" The speaker has not responded to the content of what has been said, but instead challenges the attitude with which the believer makes his point. It may be that the Christian has not even been especially blunt in his statements, but the other person is protective of the area he is addressing, and at the same time refuses to respond directly to his arguments. The speaker is avoiding the issue by appealing to factors irrelevant to the actual content of the discussion. If the believer has given a poor argument, the other person should point out its weaknesses in terms of its content or structure, not the attitude with which he has presented it. If the Christian loves the person he is speaking with, at times he may even need to be especially harsh in his confrontation, in order to expose the deeds of darkness, as Paul commands.

There are times when ministers need to "rebuke [their congregations] sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). Many people's definition of love does not tolerate this biblical command. Their concept of love is unbiblical, having their origin from humanistic ideals and not sound scriptural understanding. True biblical love is at times soft and yielding, but at other times blunt, uncompromising, and confrontational. It is not up to the unbelievers to dictate to us what it means to walk in love in a given situation.

Parents, whether Christian or not, may at times use the biblical command, "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12) to manipulate their children. If the requested action is indeed unbiblical, the Christian is under no obligation to obey. Rather, he has a duty to God to resist his parents on the matter. The biblical command to honor our parents does

not extend to unbiblical requests. For example, Matthew 10:33-37, 19:29, Mark 3:32-35, and Luke 9:59-60 all instruct us to regard Jesus Christ and the gospel as more important than family. Any biblical statement must be understood in the light and context of other parts of Scripture, and it is not up to the manipulative Christians and non-Christians to interpret the Bible for us using their twisted manner of thinking. Again, we only need to honor our parents on God's terms – that is, as defined by God, not manipulative parents.

This is, of course, not to say that we need not pay attention to our parents. This example is merely used to illustrate that there are those who distort the meaning of Scripture in the attempt to make Christians do what they want. We must be careful lest we, as those who fear God and his commands, become the playthings of those who have no such reverence for him.

Another form of appealing to pity relates one's argument to the suffering of single mothers, starving children, the handicapped, the poverty-stricken, the diseased, and other disadvantaged groups. The speaker relates the disadvantaged to his position in a way that their future will depend on the success of his argument. He may phrase his argument in such a way that to disagree with it is to be against the welfare of the disadvantaged.

If the argument is indeed related to the disadvantaged, then this would not be an appeal to pity, and thus not a fallacy. However, unless the relationship is self-evident, the burden of proof is upon the speaker to make the connection between the disadvantaged people and his argument. When there is an unwarranted appeal to pity, the other party should recognize this and expose it.

In an appeal to pity, the speaker may refer to a group in need, or may pose as a victim himself. In general, a reference to disadvantaged groups is not fallacious only if this move contributes to the logic of the argument. The appeal to pity is a very common move in argumentation – do not be fooled.

*Circular Reasoning.* This fallacy is also called "begging the question," where the conclusion of an argument is assumed in one of its premises. Since the argument is trying to prove the conclusion true, it should not use the conclusion itself as one of its premises, nor can it use a premise that first requires the conclusion to be true.

Christians are often ridiculed for proving the existence of God with a circular argument:

1. The Bible is the word of God.
2. The Bible says that God exists.
3. Therefore, God exists.

The argument as stated is circular, since it assumes the existence of God in the first premise, while this is precisely the point being debated. However, every worldview is based on a first principle, or an axiom, from which the entire system of thought is supposedly deduced. A transcendental argument may be constructed so that the Christian worldview becomes the precondition of intelligibility and rationality.

Thus, even though the premise, "The Bible is the word of God" appears as the self-authenticating first premise, the argument is still sound and logically irrefutable, since it is used as the first principle of the Christian worldview, and asserted to be the precondition of all thought and knowledge. As to how to demonstrate such a claim in argumentation, one must refer to my other writings.

That said, the fallacy of circular reasoning is frequently committed by non-Christian arguments and worldviews. For example, one claiming to be scientifically-minded may favor an empirical epistemology, where experience or sensation as a way to discovered truth is counted as reliable. However, experience itself is not self-authenticating, one cannot, by experience, prove experience to be a reliable way of investigation before experience is demonstrated to be reliable. If one has not yet shown that experience is reliable, he cannot then use experience as a test to see whether experience is reliable. To do so is to reason in a vicious circle. But such fallacious thinking permeates non-Christian thought.

On the other hand, within the Christian worldview, an all-powerful and all-knowing God reveals the truth to us by verbal revelation. God, being what he is, authenticates his own claim. As the Scripture says, he can swear by no greater. The content of our first principle – that is, the entire Christian worldview – contains the necessary element to render it self-authenticating, whereas empiricism and other secular theories fail to do so.

*Complex Question.* This is also called a "loaded question." It poses to the hearer a question "loaded" with an assumption with which he may disagree. This type of question contains unjustified or unproven assumptions.

A common example used to illustrate this is when a lawyer asks the defendant, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" The defendant is requested to answer either in the affirmative or the negative, but either option produces an admission of guilt. If the defendant answers in the affirmative, that he has indeed stopped beating his wife, then it implies that he has at one point been beating his wife. If he answers in the negative, then it implies that he is currently beating his wife. It may be that he has never beaten his wife at all, but the question as it is worded does not allow for this possibility.

The same question would not be loaded if, in the process of the cross-examination, the lawyer has already established that the defendant has been beating his wife. If the lawyer asks, "Have you ever beaten your wife?" and the defendant answers in the affirmative, the lawyer may then proceed to ask, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" The latter would be a fair question when such a context has been established.

Some questions are more like accusations than inquires. The question, "What time is it?" sounds like a neutral question, while "You are very intelligent, aren't you?" would be a compliment, given a proper context and that it is not spoken in a sarcastic manner. However, "You failed again, didn't you?" may be the same as saying, "You failed again," but accusations that are disguised as questions may often be subtler than this.

Not only may questions be loaded with meaning, but statements may also contain words and phrases that carry negative connotations. They may be worded in ways that appear to be friendly, but are verbal attacks in reality. In such cases, the reader should expose the loaded language, and request that the question or statement be rephrased so as to carry no unjustified negative insinuations. However, once a position has been demonstrated as negative, a person may be justified in using words and phrases that reflect this when referring to it.

*Correlation and Causation.* This fallacy confuses correlation with causation. Just because event X happens before event Y does not mean that the former is the cause of the latter.

There is a typical example used to illustrate this fallacy. A man drank a different type of alcoholic beverage as well as milk in three consecutive evenings, and he became drunk all these three nights. Afterward, he told people that he was intoxicated by drinking milk! The milk appears to be the common factor in his getting drunk, since he had different types of alcoholic drink each night, but he had milk every night. But we think that it was the alcohol that caused him to be drunk. The milk was merely a correlation to his intoxication, but not the cause.

If the man had stopped drinking milk, he would have continued to get drunk. The milk is not a cause of intoxication, and is not even a necessary condition for it. Sometimes, there are necessary conditions for something to happen, but they may not constitute the sufficient cause. When someone claims a factor to be the cause of something, the reader should consider whether this is so, or if it is merely a correlation.

The entire scientific enterprise suffers under the problems described by this fallacy. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the cause in any given operation. Not having a grounding in the philosophy of science, many students and even professional scientists possess a naïve confidence in science that is totally unwarranted.

*Diversion.* This fallacy is also called a "red herring," where one throws out statements that may gain attention, but are irrelevant to the topic of discussion. One should always have the topic of discussion clearly in mind when speaking with other people. This way, he will be more likely to notice a red herring when the other person seeks to distract him or the audience using such a tactic.

Upon noticing a red herring, one may expose the fallacy and attempt to force the opponent back on real issue. On the other hand, if the opponent can make the connection between what one perceives as a diversion and the current topic, then it is not a red herring, and he will have to deal with his arguments. In any case, one must not allow a desperate opponent to create a distraction by his efforts to connect a red herring to the current discussion so that one will have less time to present his arguments. If a red herring is detected, terminate it quickly.

*Equivocation.* We have already mentioned the fallacy of equivocation in this chapter without using its name. This is when an argument changes the meaning of what appears to be the same word or term within the argument.

Consider the statement, "Tom is a *bright* student, so *bright* that we never turn on the lights when he is in the room." This type of change in meaning in the words used may be called a pun in certain contexts, but it is a fallacy of equivocation when used in an argument. The first instance of the word "bright" may mean "intelligent," but the second instance of the word is used in the same way as when we are describing the amount of light coming from the sun or a lamp. What appears to be the same word means different things in the statement.

Equivocation is also called the four-term fallacy. A valid argument may contain three terms:

1. All dogs are animals.
2. All animals are living things.
3. Therefore, all dogs are living things.

If A represents *dogs*, B for *animals*, and C for *living things*, the argument is seen to be in the form of:

1. All A is B.
2. All B is C.
3. Therefore, all A is C.

The B in statement (1) carries the same meaning as when used in statement (2), which enables a relationship to be formed between A and C. There are three terms in this argument – *dogs*, *animals*, and *living things*, with the second or "middle" term serving as the connection between the first and the third.

Now, look at this argument:

1. Tom is a bright person.
2. Bright objects radiate light.
3. Therefore, Tom radiates light.

If we let A represent *Tom*, B for *bright*, and C for *light radiates from*. Then, this argument seems to be in the same form as the previous one:

1. All A is B.
2. All B is C.
3. Therefore, all A is C.



However, the B in statement (1) and the B in (2) carry different meanings. The former means "intelligent," and the second one refers to the amount of light that something is giving off, so we should use different letters to represent the two.

If we let I stand for *intelligent*, we may restate the argument as:

1. All A is I.
2. All B is C.
3. Therefore, all A is C.

If we use words instead of letters, the argument will now appear as:

1. Tom is an intelligent person.
2. Bright objects radiate light.
3. Therefore, Tom radiates light.

There are four terms in this argument instead of three, and there is nothing connecting statement (1) and (2), or A to C. Since there is nothing to relate A to C, the conclusion does not follow from the premises.

This fallacy appears often in the teaching of religious cults that attempt to borrow Christian terms. Some cult members may insist that they adhere to many or even most of the traditional Christian beliefs, but they use the terms in vastly different ways. They may alter the definitions of the terms as they speak, sometimes even within the same sentence. Christians who are unaware may be confused, and feel at a loss as to how to respond. Learning about this fallacy helps us understand what they are doing, and why it is logically indefensible.

*Fallacy of Composition.* This fallacy mistakenly thinks that what is true of the parts are necessarily true of the whole. For example, sports players who are highly skilled as individuals may not work together well enough to form a winning team. Better results are possible if these players are mixed with those who are less skilled, but who can work better with them.

*Fallacy of Division.* This fallacy assumes that what is true of the whole is also true of the parts. Some players of a winning team may be relatively incompetent, but they are able to work with other players in such a way that the team may defeat another team composed of better players.

*Fallacy of the General Rule.* This fallacy assumes that a general rule will apply to a specific situation. Any general rule deserving such a name should be applicable in most cases, but perhaps not in every instance. When applying a general rule to a specific situation in an argument, make sure that the rule applies; otherwise, one may at most argue that its applicability to the situation is at least probable.

*Fallacy of Hasty Generalizations.* This fallacy falsely forms a general rule out of an insufficient amount of data or an incorrect interpretation of the data. Based on the observation of a number of events, a person may form the general rule that most or all similar situations will occur or result in a similar way. However, the events observed may be the exceptions to the way things generally happen, and therefore the observer may have derived a wrong general principle.

A person may conclude that most or all of the people in the X profession are dishonest, but he may have encountered only four or five members out of the tens of thousands within that profession. Dishonest individuals may only be a minority. The observer has made a hasty generalization. Even if the observer is correct, there is no way to tell based on his observation, and the general rule should not be accepted based on his data.

Induction is always a formal fallacy, since it is impossible to formulate logically certain universal principles by observing particulars. This being so, all science is fallacious, and can never discover any truth at all. Science cannot be viewed as anything more than a pragmatic enterprise. As to discovering the true nature of things, it is completely impotent. Universals can only be known through revelation in Scripture, or the innate knowledge God has placed in the mind of man.

*False Analogy.* Analogies are dangerous, since they are usually too ambiguous. A good analogy includes similarities relevant to the situation under discussion, with differences that are non-essential to the position being asserted. If the analogy is similar to the position being asserted only in irrelevant areas, or if it is different in the essential parts, then it fails to defend the position being asserted.

I may say: "Just as you would thank X for doing something for you, you should also thank Y for doing something for you." This analogy is similar in the essential part, which is the appropriateness of thanking another, but it is different in the part supposedly irrelevant to the argument, which is the identity of the person. The argument assumes that the hearer agrees with me in thanking X, and asserts that the difference between X and Y does not justify different treatment between the two; therefore, just as the hearer would thank X, he should also thank Y under similar circumstances.

*False Dilemma.* A dilemma exists when there are two choices, where the denial of one necessitates the affirmation of the other. A true dilemma might be:

1. Either you are a man, or you are a woman.
2. You are not a woman.
3. Therefore, you are a man.

Premise (1) proposes two options. Both options cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense. So, assuming that a person cannot be both male and female at the same time and in the same sense, this example generates a true dilemma, where the denial of one gender necessitates the affirmation of the other.

A dilemma comes in the form of:

1. Either X or Y.
2. Not Y.
3. Therefore, X.

For the sake of clarity, we may expand it to:

1. Either X is true or Y is true, but not both.
2. Y is not true.
3. Therefore, X is true.

A false dilemma may be one where the first premise does not give two mutually exclusive options. For example:

1. Either you are an accountant, or you are married.
2. You are not married.
3. Therefore, you are an accountant.

Under usual circumstances, this would be a false dilemma, since being married does not prevent one from also being an accountant, and accountants are usually not compelled to remain single.

An argument that fails to exhaust all the possible options may also produce a false dilemma. For example, given a student who has just scored well on an exam, we may propose the following dilemma:

1. Either the student is intelligent, or he is a cheater.
2. The student is not intelligent.
3. Therefore, he is a cheater.

The form of the argument is valid, but the premises are not necessarily true. Assuming that premise (2) is true, that the student lacks intelligence, the argument then only allows for the possibility of dishonesty. However, other explanations may be suggested, such as the possibility that, although the student is unintelligent, he had studied diligently for the exam, and therefore obtained a high score. This is a possible explanation not considered in the argument. Therefore, the argument produces a false dilemma.

When encountering a false dilemma, one may neutralize it by showing that the options are not mutually exclusive, or that the argument ignores other possibilities.

*Gambler's Fallacy.* The gambler's fallacy is an interesting one. It falsely assumes that the outcome of an event affects the future probability of the outcome of a like event, when the probability of the outcomes are independent in each instance.

In the context of gambling, some imagine that the more times one loses, the more likely it is for one to win the next time. This is not true if the probability of winning and losing in each instance is independent from other instances. After losing many times in a row, the probability of winning in the next game remains the same if each bet is independent of the others.

*Guilt by Association.* This fallacy attributes characteristics to objects or persons based on the people, events, or things with which they are connected. To assume that a person of a group exhibits certain characteristics may be an example of this fallacy.

A similar fallacy is the *genetic fallacy*, where, for example, an idea may be criticized because of its origin. Although a trusted source may produce ideas that are automatically given more credibility, this does not mean that those ideas are correct, and ideas originating from a disrespected source are not necessarily incorrect.

*Name-calling.* This is a common fallacy whose use is often mistakenly asserted and regarded as constituting an argument. A person committing this fallacy may make an assertion using words loaded with negative connotations against the other person or his position without offering a logical argument. In other words, instead of attempting to persuade through the use of rational argumentation, the speaker labels the other person or his position with names carrying negative connotations.

For example, someone may make a remark concerning another person, his beliefs, or his actions, and when the latter tries to make a reasoned defense, the former may call the latter "sensitive," or "defensive." This is the coward's way of social interaction. The former has committed himself to a debate by his initiate remarks. The latter does not need to tolerate them in silence, especially if the comments are hostile, accusatory, and false. The accused should be permitted to respond. If he responds, he should also be permitted to do it well. If he does it well, it means that his speech would be latent with forceful arguments, irrefutable logic, and solid evidence.

Unless the person who brings up the subject is some sort of a social tyrant, he should have the courtesy to allow the person he has accused or ridiculed to respond and refute his claims. If the person has made a reasoned defense, using logical arguments and citing evidence in support, then the former should either accept the response and retract his comments, or if he disagrees, should issue forth a counterargument.

Calling someone who has responded well as "sensitive," or "defensive" does not answer the argument, and shows blatant disrespect for those who takes the time, care, and effort to answer the remarks made concerning him. Is the person in fact sensitive or defensive, or is it because the person has responded so well that he has overwhelmed his accuser? The accuser, attempting to avoid embarrassment, dodges the issue with this fallacy of name-calling.

Those who use name-calling may say it is not that they do not allow the other person to respond, but that the person has provided too extensive of a response to some rather

innocent comments. This is saying that the response is disproportionate to the simple remarks. However, it was the former person who brought up the issue, and therefore he is responsible for answering any counterarguments that the latter presents. Instead of accusing the latter person with ambiguous and unsubstantiated names, they are obligated to follow through with either an answer to the refutation, or they must retract the original comments. A person who is not prepared to endure the consequences of his words should remain silent.

I am dealing with this fallacy in some detail, as I have done with the appeal to pity, because like the appeal to pity, this fallacy is often used against the Christian. Instead of answering our arguments, unbelievers call us "close-minded," "bigoted," "rigid," "dogmatic," and so on. Although the name-calling move does not in fact present an argument, one can be made out of it and then analyzed. The accusation of being "close-minded," for example, can be formulated into this argument:

1. All close-mindedness is wrong.
2. Christianity is close-minded.
3. Therefore, Christianity is wrong.

When formulated neatly like this, the close-mindedness argument exhibits several fatal defects:

(1) The first premise needs to be proven, and the word "close-minded" needs to be defined. Why is it wrong to be close-minded? After the person has clearly articulated his argument on the reason for rejecting close-minded views, he must then proceed to demonstrate that Christianity is close-minded.

(2) The close-mindedness argument does not address the issue of truth. Christians hold to certain beliefs because they consider them true. Being open to possibilities other than truth is the same as being open to falsehood and deception, which is foolishness. If one wants to challenge Christianity, one must disprove the arguments and evidence in our favor, instead of trying to get around the real issue by calling us bad names.

(3) Believers affirm the Christian worldview because they believe that it is exclusively true. On this basis, we may call "open-minded" individuals gullible and stupid, since they accept the primacy of "tolerance" at the expense of truth.

(4) Those who call us close-minded are themselves close-minded, since they do not allow for the possibility that it is wrong to be open-minded. They are closed to the view that one a person has discovered the truth, he should be close-minded.

(5) The act of name-calling merely puts derogatory labels on people – it does not offer actual arguments. What one calls close-minded, another may call decisive, resolute, unwavering, precise, and specific. What one calls sensitive, another may call observant. What one calls defensive, another may call responsive. What one may call paranoid, another may call meticulous and responsible. It may be possible to replace every negative

label with five positive ones, and the entire process does not amount to much. We need more than name-calling to defend or refute arguments.

Those who support homosexuality may call those who oppose it "homophobic." If this is just a sound to identify those who oppose homosexuality without any inherently negative meaning, and the word serves the same function as X or Y, then it is fine. But this is not the case, much like the word "rapist" can be neutral. Many take the word "homophobic" to mean those who *fear* or *hate* homosexuals. The term implies that no one who is against homosexuality does not always fear or hate homosexuals. This needs to be established instead of assumed without argument.

Calling someone a homophobic is not the same as making an argument as to why homosexuality is an acceptable sexual orientation. Those who oppose homosexuality can just as easily label homosexuals and those who support them as "heterophobics," and Christians can call all those who oppose Christianity as "christophobics" or "theophobics." However, none of these are legitimate arguments; they are just names.

When a person is being faced with a name-calling move in argumentation, he should expose it as such, and demand to hear an argument using non-loaded language, supported by reason and evidence instead.

*Personal Attack.* Persons who may not seem qualified to address a certain topic may at times make true statements concerning it. The personal attack move in argumentation directs the assault to the person instead of his views. This is usually fallacious, especially when one is attacking the other on areas unrelated to the topic.

If the discussion has to do with economic policies, then attacking a person's marriage fails to address the issue. Even when one has successfully attacked another on an issue related to the topic, it is still possible for the person to make valuable contributions to the discussion. A doctor who smokes, or who practices some other habit usually considered unhealthy, may nevertheless have much to offer in terms of advice on one's health. The doctor may fail to adhere to his own suggestions, but that does not mean his views on the subject are necessarily wrong or uninformed.

Some people use their failures and shortcomings as credentials that qualify them as authorities. A person may attempt to give another person marriage advice. When the latter protests that the former had failed in his own marriage, the person then claims that it is the failures and the problems in his marriage that grant him valuable experience, qualifying him to give advice to others.

One needs to consider this assertion carefully. By this type of reasoning, one who has failed in business once is qualified to give advice to another who is just starting, but does it imply that a person who has failed in business fifty times is even more qualified? Failure in an area does not make one an expert; nevertheless, one who has failed but now succeeds may indeed be able to give some valuable suggestions. In any case, we should evaluate any advice from others with caution.

Personal attacks should not always be dismissed as fallacious, especially when the credibility of the person is important to the strength of the argument. In a court of law, a convicted perjurer's testimony should probably be considered less credible than one with no such records, and who has no motive or apparent disposition toward lying. However, even a compulsive liar may tell the truth. Therefore, although we may determine the reasonableness of believing a certain person based on his credibility, we cannot judge whether what he says is true or false on this basis.

When encountered with an irrelevant personal attack, the reader should expose this as such, and state that the personal accusation has nothing to do with the dispute in progress. However, when the reader is faced with a relevant personal attack, he should either show the attack to be non-factual, or that his argument should be accepted in this particular case regardless of the personal attack.

*Selective Evidence.* This fallacy is also called "special pleading." One often sees this type of fallacy in arguments for evolution. They may present arguments that seem, at least to them, to support their views on the subject, but fail to present and reconcile all the other evidence. But this fallacy does not only appear in science, but in all kinds of arguments, such as discussions on historical events.

*Slippery Slope.* A slippery slope argument says that if something is true, or is accepted as true, it will begin a chain of events that leads to some negative logical or actual consequences. That is, if A is true, it will lead to B, which will lead to C, which in turn will lead to D, and so on. This move is a fallacy when the speaker exaggerates the results of the challenged premise and force the argument into a negative end, but it is not a logical fallacy if the premise will in fact lead to the projected consequences.

An example of a slippery slope argument may be:

1. If Tom does not get enough sleep, he will become irritable.
2. If Tom becomes irritable, he will hit somebody.
3. If Tom hits somebody, the person will be seriously injured.
4. If the person is serious injured, Tom will go to jail.
5. If Tom goes to jail, he will fail to finish college.
6. If Tom fails to finish college, he will not become a scientist.
7. If Tom does not become a scientist, he will not invent the device that will save the planet.
8. If Tom does not invent the device that will save the world, this planet will be destroyed.
9. Therefore, if Tom does not get enough sleep, this planet will be destroyed.

The above scenario is logically possible, but it appears so unlikely that it fails to persuade. If the speaker truly believes in the argument, he should bring arguments to support his premises.

*Straw Man.* The straw man fallacy occurs when a person proposes a false, and usually weaker, version of the opponent's view, and then proceeds to demolish this misrepresentation. Even if the person succeeds in destroying the straw man, he has not refuted his opponent. This fallacy occurs either because the speaker may have misunderstood his opponent, or he may find a misrepresentation easier to refute than the opponent's actual position. If the audience is not astute enough, it may think that the speaker has successfully refuted his opponent when he has done no such thing at all.

When debating a member of a non-Christian religion or a cult, the Christian may often be accused of committing the straw man fallacy. This happens for several reasons: (1) The Christian may have indeed misrepresented the cult's position; (2) The person is lying; that is, the Christian has clearly refuted the cult's beliefs, and the cult member is now hiding behind a straw man excuse, hoping that it will shield him from harm; (3) The Christian has not misrepresented the cult's position, but the cult member does not even understand the position of his own group, and upon seeing his position defeated, he thinks that his view must have been misrepresented; (4) Compared to Christianity, most cults place little emphasis on the details and technicalities of their teaching, with the result that the members are often very diverse in their views, even regarding their central beliefs. The Christian may have correctly represented the beliefs that some people within the group hold, probably even the official version, but not the personal beliefs of his immediate opponent.

The above reasons for being accused of making the straw man fallacy do not only apply to conversations with cult members, but also in many other situations. For example, corresponding to (3), a person may have never verbalized his own beliefs, even to himself; therefore, when his view, as perceived by another, has been refuted, he feels that he must have been misrepresented, when this may or may not be the case.

When accused of committing the straw man fallacy, one must examine if he has indeed misrepresented the opponent. If so, ask the opponent to clarify his view and then restate the argument so as to meet it squarely. When dealing with cults, a member may insist, "My group does not believe that." When this happens, ask the cult member, "All right, tell me what you believe." Ask questions to help understand what he is saying. Then, rephrase it to make him commit to a position, saying, "Just to make sure that I understand what you believe, you are saying that..." When the opponent confirms that his view has been correctly understood, then one may proceed to refute it.

Sometimes it is preferable if a third party is present, so that the cult member will not be able to alter his view when it has been refuted, and hides behind a straw man again. Although it may seem drastic, at times it may be necessary for the cult member to commit to a certain position in writing, so that he may not alter what he has said right after he has been defeated by the Christian. Even though the cult member is being discussed here, the same applies to all non-Christians – many tend to use the straw man fallacy as an excuse when they cannot withstand the Christian's arguments.



When cult members accuse Christians of having made a straw man fallacy, we should take it seriously, knowing that we also are often misrepresented. We should give them the opportunity to clarify their position, then refute the official and personal versions of what they believe, just as those who misrepresent Christianity should give us the same opportunity. However, we can also be falsely accused of having made this fallacy, so we should not admit to it too quickly when accused of such, especially when we have done extensive research on the opponent's beliefs.

**Conclusion.** We have studied twenty-six common logical fallacies. Some of the examples given above may seem simplistic, but the principles taught in this chapter can be applied to much more complex arguments. Arguments are often more complicated, but we had to work with simple examples in this chapter to ensure that the principles themselves are understood.

There are two principles that we must remember when applying logic to everyday conversations. These may be called *the probability principle* and *the courtesy principle*.

*The Probability Principle.* We often see deductive arguments such as the following:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Tom is a man.
3. Therefore, Tom is mortal.

This is a valid argument. If it is true that all men are mortal, and Tom is truly a man, then there is no possible conclusion other than that Tom is mortal. However, even with arguments as obviously true as this one, the truth of the conclusion may often be only probable, at times even extremely likely, but still not certain.

To illustrate, premise (1) is usually taken for granted, but we really cannot be certain about its truth based on experience alone. To establish a statement such as (1) based on experience and observation with certainty, we must observe the death of every human being in history, the death of those living at the present, and then the observer himself must die.

Premises based on experience or observation, as in scientific investigations, are at best tentative, and can never come to know the absolute truth about any issue. But since science cannot even prove empiricism, strictly speaking it cannot even form tentative claims. The only epistemology that makes knowledge possible is the Christian worldview, in which an all-powerful and all-knowing God is said to reveal truths to us through verbal revelation.

Unless the Christian worldview is presupposed, no argument is certain or even probable. Nevertheless, if we were to, quite illegitimately, grant that truth may be known without first presupposing the Christian worldview, the probability principle tells us that many arguments are probable but not certain, but for practical purposes, we accept the premises as true, as well as the conclusions that necessarily follow them. But in a situation where certainty is required, we may challenge the premises that are only probable. Therefore, this

is not to say that we never challenge probable premises, but that we often do not do so for practical purposes.

Some arguments can be considered as certain. For example, if I say that:

1. All ten coins in my pocket are quarters.
2. I am taking a coin out of my pocket.
3. Therefore, the coin I am taking out must be a quarter.

This is a valid argument. The conclusion must be true if the premises are true, and premise (1) can be verified. I may have put the coins into the pocket myself, knowing that they are all quarters, or I may take them out and examine each of them to confirm the first premise. But of course, without presupposing the Christian worldview, even such procedures are doomed by the defects inherent in empiricism.

Another example of an argument that is based on certain premises and yields a certain conclusion may be:

1. A bachelor is an unmarried man.
2. Tom is a bachelor.
3. Therefore, Tom is an unmarried man.

It seems that there is no way for this argument to be wrong – it is true by definition. Yet, even definitions, logic, and grammar are uncertain unless the Christian worldview is presupposed, so that the mind of the omnipotent and omniscient God may guarantee that the laws of thought are uniform and constant.

*The Courtesy Principle.* There are times when one will hear a poor argument given in support of a position, but he is able to construct a stronger one for it, perhaps due to superior knowledge and resources. The opponent may be endorsing the correct view, or at least a probable one, but he does not know how best to argue for it.

In such cases, the weak argument the person gives should not be held against him, unless it happens within the context of a debate. Unless he is in a debate, one do not humiliate the other person right away when he notices a fallacy in his reasoning. Even the experts may commit logical fallacies at times for various reasons, such as a predisposition toward a given position, or plain negligence.

If one is not in a hostile situation, he should gently point out the fallacy, and give the other person an opportunity to modify the argument before a refutation is offered. The opponent may choose to retract his argument, or revise it to eliminate the fallacy, if possible. It is reasonable to offer this opportunity to the other when one is involved in a friendly discussion, and not a heated debate.

Proficiency with the principles of logic begins with being familiar with the materials in this chapter. By analyzing arguments that one encounters through the suggested procedure and

checking them for fallacies, one will reach a point where the entire process has become natural and intuitive. He will then be able to deal logically with arguments even during a heated conversation or debate with another person. One may draw examples of arguments and practice scrutinizing them from reading materials, the radio, and personal conversations.

## 4. LOGIC AND THEOLOGY

Through various examples, I have demonstrated in the previous chapter how the Christian may benefit from studying logic. In this final chapter, I will further explore the necessity of logic in theological discussions, and further emphasize the importance of theology itself.

To discern good and evil, we must, as the Scripture says, be trained in the word of God. In order to wage spiritual warfare against the deception of Satan, we must know the truth, and know it with accuracy, precision, comprehensiveness, and be able to communicate and defend it. The study of logic helps us clarify and organize our thoughts. It helps us to understand the arguments others present to us, whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.

God has chosen to speak to us using human language, and what he has revealed has been recorded in the Scripture. The statements in the Bible, although they are theological and spiritual statements, are still statements of human language, and as such follow the rules of grammar and logic.

Saying that statements about God follow the rules of logic may produce the objection of whether we are saying that God himself is subject to logic. If so, we would be implying that there is an objective standard apart from God under which he himself must submit. Perhaps this is a loaded way of stating the question. If we ask whether God is "subject" to logic, then an affirmative answer, besides being misleading, will induce the subsequent objection just stated; a negative answer, on the other hand, may imply to some that God himself, the statements that he makes, and the statements made about him, do not need to adhere to the laws of logic.

But we are really asking whether God is consistently logical in his nature and in his communication with us. For example, the law of noncontradiction says, "X is not non-X" – that something cannot be true and false at the same time and in the same sense. To say that God is logical means that there is no contradiction in the divine being, and the laws of logic is a description of how he thinks. This has tremendous implications for theology, as will be shown below. To say that his communication with us adhere to the laws of logic imply that biblical propositions and their implications are never contradictory.

The Christian worldview maintains that God is logical in his nature – not that he is "subject" to logic, but that his nature is logical. Just as his nature is truth, truth proceeds from his own nature, but there is no one and nothing outside of him to hold him accountable for telling the truth. When God tells the truth, he is not doing so in obedience to anyone external to himself, but he is merely acting out of his own nature. In the same way, the laws of logic were not invented by man, but proceed from the mind of God. His nature is noncontradictory, and his communication with us is logical and coherent. Thus, God is always logical, and true statements made by and about him are always logical.

This answers an objection sometimes raised against using logic in theology. It states that if we define miracles as a temporary suspension, or even violation, of the laws of nature, then it seems that God himself should be able to violate the laws of logic in his own being, communication, and actions. Although this definition of miracles is in doubt, we will accept it for the sake of the present discussion. We will also ignore the questionable concept of the "laws of nature" for now.

Since God created the universe, and the laws of nature are subject to him. According to our present definition of a miracle, whenever one occurs, God temporarily suspends, or even works against, the laws of nature, and he can do so whenever he wishes. The question is whether the same can be said concerning the laws of logic.

The answer is that God created the universe, and had also ordained the laws of nature. However, these laws we have discovered are merely descriptive of the way nature usually operates. They do not proceed from God's own being. In other words, God could have designed the laws of nature differently than they presently exist. However, the same cannot be said of the laws of logic.

If God's own nature is logical, then the valid laws of logic which we have discovered are laws that cannot be otherwise, since God is immutable. Briefly, the laws of nature and the laws of logic are different in that the former were created, and the latter proceed from God himself, and therefore cannot be changed or even suspended. The Scripture says that, "[God] cannot disown himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). If God's own nature is noncontradictory, as we are affirming here, then he cannot speak or act in a contradictory manner, for he will not deny his own nature. The laws of logic describe the way God thinks.

Since the Bible is not a textbook on logic, we may find little that directly affirms the laws of logic in the manner that we are doing in this book. However, every statement must adhere to the laws of logic in order to be meaningful, and we do find many biblical statements that explicitly employ logical arguments, and many that imply the necessity of logic.

For example, Jesus said in Matthew 5:37, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." Although he was not addressing the topic of logic, this is precisely what the law of noncontradiction affirms. If Jesus had not endorsed the law of noncontradiction, he could not have said this and expect the statement to be true and meaningful. "Yes" must mean precisely that, and "No" must mean precisely that. Then, from the law of noncontradiction proceeds all other rules of logic.

Yet, many think that the laws of logic should not be enforced in Bible interpretation, or on theological statements. They even consider rationality to be impious and unspiritual. However, no statement can be meaningful without the laws of logic. One cannot even argue against the use of logic in theological statements without using logic, but it is self-refuting to use logic in the attempt to defeat logic.

The Bible contains numerous instances of the explicit use of logical reasoning. One such example is 1 Corinthians 15:12-18, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost."

Some were denying the resurrection of the dead. In this passage, Paul uses a series of "If...then" statements to demonstrate the absurdity and negative consequences of this belief. To fully appreciate Paul's argument, one must first understand the hypothetical syllogism. Such an argument takes the form of:

1. If X, then Y.
2. X.
3. Therefore, Y.

For the purpose of clarification, we may extend this into:

1. If X is true, then Y is true.
2. X is true.
3. Therefore, Y is true.

When premises (1) and (2) are true, this type of argument forms logically certain conclusions.

This is similar to the form that Paul's argument takes, although some of the obvious premises are assumed. For example, I may make an argument saying that, "I know Tom is not tired because instead of resting, he went jogging." This argument assumes that a tired person would choose to rest instead of jogging. Since this is a widely acknowledged assumption, it may not need to be explicitly stated unless it is challenged.

Likewise, the statement "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" contains some obvious assumptions. If we were to make this argument explicit, it may be restated as follows: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then no one has ever been or will be raised. If no one has ever been or will be raised, then Christ was not raised."

Paul's argument continues to say that if Christ was not raised, and the Christian faith depends on the truth of his resurrection, then several negative consequences logically follow: (1) Our preaching is useless; (2) Your faith is useless; (3) We are false witnesses about God – saying that Christ was raised, when in fact he was not; (4) You are still in your sins, since our justification before God depends on Christ's resurrection; (5) Those

Christians who had died are lost forever, since there is no resurrection, they will not be raised.

After demonstrating the absurdity, desperation, and hopelessness that result from denying the resurrection, Paul makes the assertion that, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

If Christ had indeed been raised from the dead, then resurrection is possible, since even one resurrection would prove that resurrection itself is possible. The Bible then reveals that Christ's resurrection is the indication of things to come, that in him "all will be made alive." However, as shown above, this would not be possible if Christ has never been raised, and it would not be possible for Christ to have been raised if no resurrection is possible at all.

Earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argues for the truth of the resurrection of Christ as follows: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (v. 3-8).

Not only is the resurrection of Christ in accordance with the prophecy of Scripture, but there were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ, including all the apostles and more than five hundred others. Thus, Paul first presents a case for believing in Christ's resurrection, and then proceeds to expose the absurdity of denying the same. This is an example of how the Scripture communicates to us in a logical and coherent way. There is no respect for irrationality and appeal to "blind faith."

Jesus often used logical arguments. For example, he seemed fond of the *a fortiori* argument, where one begins from a commonly acknowledged premise, and uses another often obvious premise to establish a conclusion that appears to be even more certain than the first premise. An example of such an argument is this: "If an infant can lift this box, surely you (as a teenager) can!" This argument is being addressed to a teenager. To make this argument explicit, we can re-state it as follows:

1. An infant can lift this box.
2. A teenager is physically stronger than an infant.
3. Therefore, a teenager such as yourself can lift this box.

We may select an infant and have him lift the box. If he is successful, we will have established the first premise. The second premise is widely acknowledged, and does not need to be proven, or even stated explicitly, unless challenged. Seeing that the first two premises are true, it follows that the third premise is also true.

Jesus uses such an argument in Matthew 7:7-11, where it says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

We may restate the above argument as follows:

1. Human fathers give good gifts to their children when asked.
2. God is a superior father compared to human fathers.
3. Therefore, God will give good gifts to those who ask.

The argument begins with a commonly acknowledged first premise, then leads to a logical conclusion using an obvious second premise.

It is clear that the Bible, and even Jesus himself, is not against using logic when it comes to theological matters, but rather takes full advantage of it. I will not bombard the reader with the many other examples available in the Bible, but I recommend looking up the following passages to appreciate the point better: Matthew 6:24-34, 12:8-13, 22:31-33, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 13:10-17, Galatians 3:16, and Hebrews 2:1-4.

The true reason for some Christians' objections against the primacy of logic in theology is that many of them fail to reconcile biblical truths, or what they think to be biblical truths, with the laws of logic. They falsely believe that the Bible contains contradictory propositions, and they fear that if logic is enforced, the Bible would be proven false.

However, this is a case of incompetence in logical thinking and theological understanding, and not evidence that theological statements can be illogical. It is the cults and the heretics who formulate doctrines that prove to be contradictory. We must, therefore, learn to think logically and unambiguously, "for God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

By saying that rationality should be given its rightful place in theological studies, I am not saying that theological statements must be exhaustively understood before one can enter into a discussion, but that statements about God or spiritual things must adhere to the same principles of logic as discussions on other topics. Our statements must be logical and non-fallacious.

The trouble with speaking to cults is that they often ignore logic and speak about God in such a way that is nonsensical. They may change the word "God" from referring to the Christian concept of a personal, transcendent, supreme being to a reference to themselves, or the word "Christ" from referring to a historical person and the second person of the Trinity to an abstract idea, all in the same sentence! To conduct intelligent and meaningful discussion and debate, we must hold ourselves as well as others responsible for obeying the rules of right reasoning and communication.



False doctrines and cults are irrational, nonsensical, and incoherent. We must dispel the impression that true biblical doctrines are also this way. Rationality and coherence are integral to Christianity, and this helps us defend true biblical doctrines and defeat heresies. I urge the reader not to abandon the realm of reason to embrace the irrational, as if that is somehow more spiritual or pious.

Some who call themselves Christians reject the importance of theology itself. Due to the influence of heretical theologians and secular philosophers, many contemporary Christians have adopted the view that the knowledge of God consists mainly of experience, such as in worship or prayer, and does not refer to any intellectual content or information. They say that spiritual revelation is intuitive or experiential, and not intellectual. Revelation, according to them, carries no intellectual content, no information for the mind.

They say that *knowing* God is not the same as *knowing about* God, that knowing God in the mind is different from knowing God in the heart, and what we need to do is to know God, with knowing about him as, at best, secondary in importance, or even as something to be shunned. This is an anti-biblical position, and orthodox Christianity throughout history had been against such anti-intellectualism.

There are two ways that many understand the words "know" and "knowledge" in the Bible. The first denotes an intuitive, intimate, personal, and experiential knowledge, such as the physical relationship between husband and wife. Genesis 4:1 in the King James Version says, "And Adam knew Eve his wife," which the NIV translates into, "Adam lay with his wife Eve." The second type is intellectual, meaning it involves the mind. Modern Christians often consider the first type a superior kind of knowledge, beyond the academic and intellectual type. They consider that whatever the role of the intellectual knowledge of God is, it is secondary in importance to the experiential knowledge of God.

However, when the Bible uses the word "knowledge," or when it refers to the concept of knowing God, it means intellectual or mental knowledge. For example, Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children." God says that the people in question have "rejected knowledge." What kind of knowledge is he referring to, and what kind of knowledge does he care about, without which he will reject his people? The verse continues to say that the people have rejected knowledge in that they have "ignored the law of your God." God is not condemning the people for not having an intimate, experiential, or even mystical knowledge of him, but that they have ignored the law of God, which was written in a book, filled with intellectual contents, not mystical experiences. Those who say that knowing God is unrelated to information about God is dangerously mistaken. Knowing God is about gaining information concerning him.

Granted, one may study theology and the Bible purely as a matter of personal interest, and have no intention of committing himself to the information he has gained from his studies. Also, there are those who are familiar with Christian beliefs, but they have rejected them

as false, and some even fight against them publicly. It is still erroneous, however, to say that know God and know about him are different things; rather, we should say that one may come to know the biblical propositions without granting assent to them. But both operations are intellectual in nature.

Some reject the notion that Christianity consists of a body of truths in the form of intelligible propositions. They may cite John 5:39-40, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." To them, this passage means that the Pharisees were too serious in their study of the Scripture, and consequently had neglected Christ. They say that our focus should not be in the Scripture, but in the person of Christ. The Scripture is merely a pointer to Christ, and we should not place too much emphasis on creeds and doctrines.

However, Jesus never condemned the people for searching the Scripture, and he never denied that it is in the Scripture that they may find eternal life. It is not that they took the Scripture too seriously that they failed to acknowledge Christ, but that they did not take it seriously enough. If they were searching the Scripture, and as Jesus said, the same Scripture testifies about him, then the people ought to have acknowledged Christ if they had taken the Scripture seriously.

They were condemned not because they had studied the Scripture intellectually or formally, but for their refusal to obey the Scripture, which is to "come to [Christ] to have life." In other words, we should not study less theology, but more, only that we also need to believe what we read from the Bible, so that we may come to more accurate conclusions than the Pharisees. We should know more than they did, and when we gain an accurate understanding of certain truths, we should commit ourselves to these truths.

To confirm the above understanding, that eternal life may indeed be found in Scripture, one may refer to 2 Timothy 3:14-17, where the apostle Paul states, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Here, Paul affirms that the Scripture is "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Jesus said of the Pharisees, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life." They were right in thinking that the study of Scripture will bring them eternal life, but they rejected the teaching of the Scripture itself. So, the study of Scripture is not at fault, but a rejection of what one studies is the problem. It is the refusal to accept the content of theology that prevents one from obtaining eternal life, not the study of theology itself. This means that we should be even more committed to theology than the Pharisees, not less.

In another place, the apostle Paul exhorts Timothy: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). As Christians, we should watch how we live; however, Paul also says to "watch your...doctrine closely." Not only that, but we must "persevere" in doctrine, because if we do, we will save both our hearers and ourselves. Sound theology is a matter of eternal salvation.

Paul often prayed for the churches, that they may know more about God. In Colossians 1:9-10, we read, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."

In Philippians 1:9-11, the Scripture says, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God." "Knowledge and depth of insight" cannot be construed to mean an experiential type of knowledge, but an intellectual comprehension is in view.

Paul prays that their "love may abound...more in knowledge." In another place, Paul says that it is a "knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness" (Titus 1:1). Since it is referring to a knowledge of "the truth," he is not referring to mystical experiences or a non-intellectual sense of "knowing" God gained through prayer and worship. A godly character is thus necessarily connected with an intellectual knowledge about God.

As Colossians 3:9-10 says, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This verse indicates that we are spiritually renewed not only by some spiritual experience, prayer, worship, or the refreshing of the Holy Spirit, but that we are renewed "in knowledge."

In yet another verse Paul states, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2). Here, it is clear that spiritual transformation does not come from some mystical experiences, but we are "transformed by the renewing of [our minds]."

For those who emphasize mystical experience, let us examine Paul's account of his encounter with the resurrected Jesus: "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied" (Acts 9:3-5).

Even in such a dramatic experience, intelligible information has to be exchanged in order for the vision to be meaningful. Paul asks the person speaking to him in the vision to identify himself. It is a question, using human language, conforming to the laws of grammar, subject to the laws of logic, stated in the form of a question. Jesus then identifies himself, giving his name, and further qualifies it by a short description of his relationship with Paul, that he is, "whom [Paul was] persecuting."

Finally, Paul says in Ephesians 1:17-23: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Not only does the prayer ask God to grant the church more knowledge concerning him, but it contains tremendous doctrinal insights. For example, it discusses the resurrection of Christ and his exaltation – two of the central doctrines in systematic theology. Thus, even in prayer, doctrinal truths with intellectual contents are emphasized. Paul could not have prayed this prayer without an intellectual understanding of these theological truths. For us, this means that a rich understanding of theological and biblical truths will even enhance our prayer lives.

In the light of what we have already read, when the Scripture tells us to obtain knowledge, it cannot be referring to an experiential knowledge, but a body of knowledge that is intellectual in nature. The Scripture tells us that we should "call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding" (Proverbs 2:3), warning us that "fools hate knowledge" (Proverbs 1:22). It instructs us to, "Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge" (Proverbs 23:12).

There are many more passages on this subject, but to keep this discussion brief, I will simply list the references. When the word "knowledge" is used in these passages, it does not refer to an experiential knowledge, but to information that pertains to the intellect: 2 Chronicles 1:10-12; Psalm 119:66; Proverbs 1:1-7, 22, 29-33, 2:1-11, 5:1-2, 8:7-14, 9:10-12, 10:14, 11:9, 12:1, 13:16, 14:6-7, 18, 15:2, 7, 14, 18:15, 19:2, 20:15, 22:12, 23:12, 24:3-4, 5, 28:2; Jeremiah 3:15; Daniel 5:12; Hosea 4:6; Malachi 2:7; Luke 1:76-77; Romans 10:1-2; 2 Corinthians 2:14, 4:4-6, 11:4-6; Ephesians 4:11-15; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-10, 2:2-3, 3:5-10; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Titus 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:2-4, 3:17-18. Most professing Christians are ignorant in doctrine and inept in reasoning. It is an urgent matter for Christians to cease despising an academic study of theology.

Ephesians 4:11-14 says, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." Without the "knowledge of the Son of God," Christians will remain spiritual infants who are weak and unstable. This knowledge refers to intellectual information communicated by Scripture.

Jesus says in Matthew 22:37, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This chapter focuses on the neglected intellect, and serves as an encouragement to recover and preserve it. Intellectual development is in a very real sense equivalent to spiritual development. An intellectual understanding of physics may not directly contribute to spiritual growth, but an intellectual grasp and assent of biblical propositions is the essence of spiritual development. Jesus says to love God with all our *heart*, *soul*, and *mind*, but the biblical usage of these terms all refer to the intellect of man. To comprehend, articulate, and defend the knowledge of God as revealed to us through the Bible, we must practice logical thinking, since God is logical in himself, and he always communicates in a logical and coherent manner. We must learn the Scripture, and learn to reason from the Scripture (see Acts 17:2, 18:4, 19, 24:25).