

ARE REASONED CONCLUSIONS VALID?

By Dub McClish

Introduction

When the brethren opposed to congregational cooperation and orphan homes ran out of Scriptural positions several years ago they attacked what they called "human reason." Tom Warren's devastating unanswerable syllogisms were ridiculed as "sillygisms," but they remain unanswered to this day. Now we are seeing a reemergence of the ridicule of logic from the other end of the spectrum. The brethren who are so passionately trying to renovate the church are using the tactic. In one of the periodicals published by and for brethren who have made shipwreck of the faith, an article attacks our logical method of Biblical interpretation. The writer apologizes for ever having taught such "garbage" as the distinction between generic and specific commands, the "mythical" (as he views it) necessary inference, and assertion that some examples are binding and others are not. His conclusion is that anything that must be established through the mind's reasoning processes cannot be made a matter of fellowship (*Integrity*, March, 1970, p. 151). This author's **reasoned conclusion** that the application of reason in arriving at valid conclusions is invalid is an excellent demonstration of where the failure to properly use reason and logic will lead.

Several months ago I was in a gathering of a few families who had met to discuss the "Holy Spirit." After an elder had presented a fine Scriptural summary of the New Testament teaching on the subject, discussion was invited. One contributor (a former preacher) said that he probably agreed with most of the conclusions expressed by the elder, but that he wasn't sure that the Scriptures were really as certain as the elder had indicated on some points, such as the cessation of spiritual gifts as taught in 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. He went on to say that he felt that such a conclusion was arrived at through "human reason" rather than through the teaching of Scripture itself. While this man yet claims not to believe in miraculous gifts for us today, his statement would have given encouragement to anyone present who did believe in their current availability. His implication was that a conclusion arrived at through the application of principles of logic and reason to the Scriptures is not valid, or is at least suspect. Or, to state this implication differently, unless a conclusion is explicitly "spelled out" in exact, concise wording in a single passage, it is not valid or authoritative.

It is my opinion that the two cases cited above are not isolated but rather are representative of an approach to the Scriptures by some of the brethren from whom we shall

hear more and more. This denial of logic is especially common among those who have openly embraced Neo- Pentecostalism. The application of reason in interpreting Scripture has never been very important to the Pentecostal mind; if one begins to consistently apply reason to the Scriptures, he will not long remain a Pentecostal, the two approaches to Scripture being irreconcilable.

Some Observations on the Irrational Approach

1. One cannot attack the application of human reasoning in arriving at Scriptural Truth without attacking his own position. The conclusion that human reasoning is faulty cannot be arrived at without using human reasoning, although a flawed use of it in this case.

2. Why would anyone attack the proper function of human reasoning to arrive at logical conclusions? Perhaps some would do so because they are not intelligent enough to appreciate this function. But those in the church who are casting reflection on a rational approach to Scripture nowadays are not the uneducated. Could it be that the force of logical and reasonable conclusions is against the message they are seeking to propagate? It would not put them in a favorable light to directly attack a logical Scriptural conclusion that they have abandoned, so it becomes easier to attack the **process** by which the conclusion is arrived at, instead.

3. Failure to use our logical processes in arriving at correct conclusions results in chaos, absurdity, and false conclusions—or even to no conclusions at all. One of the greatest contributions ever made to the world by the likes of A. Campbell, Lipscomb, Lard, McGarvey, and others, came in the form of a logical, consistent, reasonable approach to Scripture study and understanding. Unless one is convinced of the necessity of using valid rules of interpretation he will never be able to arrive at the Truth. In fact, this is the key to being able to grasp the one way of the Lord as opposed to the many ways of men. I believe that division and sectarianism within and without continue to owe their existence to a failure to apply consistent principles of reason to the inspired Text. If such sound principles are not used, then "truth" is ever in a fluid state. As in Paul's day, so in ours there are those who are "ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). Granted, there are some subjects that we must continue to search out, but I am suspicious of a brother who occupies a "suspended" position on even the most incontrovertible Scriptural topics (e.g., baptism, worship, congregational organization, et al.). He is getting to be more and more in vogue, however.

4. God gave us all our abilities, including our minds (Acts 17:28–29). It is chiefly because God gave to humankind the ability of reason and thought power that he is fitted to exercise dominion over all creation (Psa. 8:4–8). It is through the mind that God's law can be grasped

and obeyed (Heb. 8:10). God instructs us to use our minds: Man is to love God with "all thy mind" (Mat. 22:37). The transformed life is accomplished through "renewing of your mind" and only through the right exercise of mind may one discern what is good and acceptable, even the perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2). Jehovah challenges men to "reason" with Him (Isa. 1:18). Paul "reasoned" with the Jews in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus and with Felix in Caesarea (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25). Paul emphasized the necessity of mature thinking (1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20). Even if we did not have such direct references in Scripture, it would still be the normal thing to do to apply one's thought processes to the written Word. God does not address his Word to the eye or ear except in a secondary sense; God's word is primarily addressed to the **human mind through these senses**. It is only by use of the ability to reason that anyone can obey the command to "handle aright the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

5. The proper application of human reason and deduction to the Scriptures results in Scriptural Truth just as surely as if God had stated the deduction in so many words. Luke does not say that Philip mentioned *baptism* when he "preached Jesus" to the Eunuch (Acts 8:34). But can anyone avoid the validity of the conclusion that he indeed preached on *baptism* when one reads in the next verse that the Eunuch requested to be baptized? The Scriptures do not give an organized summary of the "measures" of the Holy Spirit and what phenomenon each measure involves in a "reference table" form. However, one is making right use of reason to conclude that the "gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:38 is not the same "measure" as the "gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 10:45. One notes that the former is as universal as baptism and remission of sins and is not associated with miraculous accompaniment. The latter had not occurred since Pentecost (i.e., on the apostles [Acts 11:15]), was definitely related to miracles (Acts 10:46), occurred **before** baptism for remission of sins (Acts 10:48), and was identified with Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 11:16). The illustrations of the necessity of using one's reasoning power to arrive at logical conclusions are almost endless. How can anyone who loves the Lord and His Word consciously seek to undermine it?

6. A few words are in order about commands, examples and inferences (more accurately expressed as direct statements, accounts of action, and implication) since they have specifically come under attack. The distinction between generic and specific commands is not a human contrivance. God's Word makes this distinction. Man, if he is wise enough to approach God's Word with reason, discerns which are commands (i.e., direct statements, even if not in the form of commands) are general in nature (allowing some liberty in means of fulfillment) and which are specific (requiring strict adherence to the details contained in the command). Failure

to honor this distinction brings hopeless doctrinal and practical chaos. If no distinction is to be made between "binding examples" and "non-binding examples" (i.e., accounts of action"), then one is forced into one of two hopeless alternatives: (1) Either **no** examples/accounts are binding, robbing all exemplary Scriptural conduct of any authority (could this be what such individuals seek?), or (2) **all** examples/accounts are binding, which is as absurd to comprehend as it is impossible to follow. What was said in item 5 above about arriving at logical Scriptural conclusions also relates to the correct conclusions arrived at through implication, from which we draw logical inferences/deductions.

7. I do not believe that those who are attacking the logical process are really opposed to the logical process. They seem to be opposed to it only when applied to Scriptural conclusions within whose boundaries they are no longer content to abide. This is one of the trademarks of a "better-felt-than-told," emotional-sensational approach to Scriptural Truth and religion. Those who have lost their reverence for God's written Word as an objective standard seem to end up either with the infidels, denying God altogether, or with the Pentecostals (in attitude, if not actual fellowship), honoring only their own personal, narrow, subjective views. There is a disturbing trend among brethren in the latter direction. The inquiry, "Do you feel it?" the hollow "Hallelujahs!" and "Praise the Lords," the darkened room, the sensitivity groups, the raised fluttering of hands during worship, the obsession with the Holy Spirit, the de-emphasis on the authority of the Word are all a part of the paraphernalia of the hyperemotional, mystical aura that some are seeking to impose on the Lord's church. James Bales is right as he says, "The distrust of the mind is an essential step into Pentecostalism wherein emotions sweep aside reason and Scripture" (*Pat Boone and the Gift of Tongues*, p. 40). Such individuals advocate distrust of the right use of the mind only up to a point, do not forget. That point is where the spotlight of unalterable, unanswerable Truth is made to focus on their unwillingness to abide "in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:6).

8. Undoubtedly, these folk who think they have some spiritual "optional equipment," which the rest of their behind-the-times brethren do not have, are sincere. They apparently believe sincerely that they have found the answers to all of the problems in the church that even Paul, Peter, and John never completely solved. One of these fellows remarked in my presence a few months ago that we had to "put some new life in these bones," referring to the church. He had come home on furlough from the mission field a few months earlier, praising the ultra-liberal *Mission Magazine* and the new "spirit of free thinking in the brotherhood" as he put it, indicating what he meant by the "new life" he wanted to put into those "old bones." He meant that he

considered the church to be dead and in need of resurrecting. Strangely, this same man does not mind accepting support from several of these "dead" churches to go back to his field of work and spread his false doctrine. He thinks that he has the answer in seeking to get everybody all excited about what he imagines the Holy Spirit can do for them directly, if they will just let Him. However, such influences will not enliven the church, but will destroy it if allowed to have free course. The church can maintain her identity only through adherence to God's pattern for it (Heb. 8:5–6). I get the impression that these emotionalists do not even believe in a pattern concept anymore. Their emphasis leads to each man's operating on the "authenticity" of his feelings instead of on the authority of his faith. Give them one generation's time and most of the church will not be distinguishable from the "Assembly of God" sect. Already, some are so bold as to seriously suggest such a merger (*Integrity*, September, 1971, pp. 52–53). Sincerity of purpose is not a good enough excuse to wreck the church.

9. In my insistence upon the proper use of human reason, let it be understood that I am not advocating any sort of use that circumvents, wrests, perverts, ignores or denies any principle of God's Truth. All of our reasoning must be centered in and checked and counter-checked by that one great well of spiritual Truth, God's Word. I am simply insisting that we continue to apply logic and reason to the text in order to be able to arrive at truthful conclusions.

Conclusion

I believe that Paul's lament over an indictment of Israel strikes a fitting parallel to the attitudes addressed in this article: "Brethren, my heart's desire and my supplication to God is for them, that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1–3).

[Note: I wrote this article for and it was published in the February 9, 1973, issue of *Words of Truth*, Gus Nichols, editor. I pecked it out on a typewriter in the pre-computer era while living in Carlsbad, NM.]