

In the Light of Logic

The fallacies of Appearance and Manner

One of the easiest ways to misjudge a person, place or thing is by its appearance. But what we often fail to recognize is that placing too much faith in appearances is fundamentally illogical. A handsome politician is more likely to be elected because of people's feeling that he looks like he would make a good leader, when in reality he is an incompetent moron. If a salesman is dressed well, people are more likely to buy from him, having more confidence in him than if he were dressed poorly. Yet what logical correlation exists between his appearance and the quality of the product or service that he sells? Basically, none.

My wife was having her fingernails worked on some time ago, and told the nail lady in the course of conversation that she was a minister. Karen explained to her that she was going to a special event and wanted her nails to look nice, but that generally she wasn't that concerned about her nails at this point in her life. The gal expressed with strong convictions that she would not believe a word someone said about the Bible if they went around with unfinished fingernails. Her thinking, though extremely common in its various forms, is illogical. There are plenty of people with fabulous fingernails who mishandle the Word of God, and people with nasty fingernails who have the love of God and can teach the truth. There is no necessary connection between the state of one's fingernails and his ability to speak the truth.

There is nothing wrong with a wholesome appearance, and indeed we should try to put our best foot forward. As the saying goes, we never get a second chance at making a good first impression. But when appearance becomes the sole or even primary basis upon which one decides to buy or believe something or someone, a fallacy is committed and one is acting irrationally. Con men deceive many people by appealing to just this sort of person, who judges not by the merits of the product or idea itself, but by the appearance and manner of the person promoting it.

There are many examples of this fallacy in God's Word, and it plays a large part in man's difficulty in walking by the spirit or living by the revealed Word of God instead of his five senses. The more the believer can train his mind to think logically and not make superficial judgments on the appearance of things, the more effectually he will walk by the spirit. 1 Samuel 16 is the record of Samuel choosing a king from the sons of Jesse, and being deceived by appearances.

1 Samuel 16:6 and 7 (KJV)

(6) And it came to pass, when they (the sons of Jesse) were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.

(7) But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on, his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Sound thinking is a prerequisite to acquiring consistent spiritual perception and awareness. Before a believer can very effectually operate the revelation manifestations of the spirit (word of knowledge, word of wisdom, discerning of spirits), he must get to the point that he is not deceived by the five senses. One of the principal ways he is misled by the senses is by the irrational regard for the appearance of things without looking deeper for the real intent or meaning behind an action or event.

This is well illustrated by Peter's stand which he took against Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

Acts 5:1 and 2 (KJV)

- (1) But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price,
- (2) his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

These believers looked very sincere and religious, selling a possession that they need not have sold to give to the outreach of God's Word. The appearance of their action was very good indeed, but their hearts were not right, because they gave it more to please men than God. Had Peter been walking by his five senses he would have been deceived. But he was not only spiritually sharp to receive from God the information that they were lying, he was thinking logically. This kept his heart open to receive such information. Generally, revelation starts where the five senses end. What one can know by his senses God expects him to know. And certainly one thing God expects man to know is that appearances are deceiving, and not to be regarded as any necessary indicator of credibility or truth.

Manner

As mentioned, another fallacy similar to appearance is *manner*, in which one is led to believe that an assertion is true because the one asserting it is very sincere or confident in his manner. This is a very persuasive tool, even employed by many Christian teachers whose bold and confident manner deceives many. Certainly confidence and sincerity are important qualities for Christian believers and leaders to possess. But one may be sincerely in error, or with the greatest of confidence assert a lie. Therefore, God's people should not be overly awed at the bold and confident manner in which a teacher or preacher speaks, and take a good look at what is actually being said in light of God's Word, which is the only standard for truth.

One should never be overawed by the manner in which a statement is presented to the extent that he believes without first understanding or investigating what is said. Simon the sorcerer had bewitched the people of Samaria with his sorceries and with his confident manner as is recorded in Acts 8:

Acts 8:9 (KJV)

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.

The people of Samaria were hoodwinked by his self-confidence. To the extent that they were swayed by his confident manner they were acting irrationally. It is certainly appropriate for someone who knows and speaks the truth to speak with confidence and authority (Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:22). But people are acting irrationally if they accept what is said solely or primarily on the basis of the manner in which it is presented. Such acceptance is usually short-lived anyway, enduring only as long as the person who is convinced is personally present. People need to be grafted to the truth of God's Word, the actual substance of the teaching, rather than being persuaded by the confident manner of a particular speaker. It is fundamentally irrational to accept a proposition without rational thought on the basis of the manner in which it is taught.

Sincerity is an important facet of this fallacy of *Manner*. Often a person can persuade others by convincing them that he is convinced, and not by providing supporting evidence. To the extent one is swayed by a person's sincerity apart from evidence he is acting irrationally. The Berean believers were not overly awed by the Apostle Paul's convictions, and rather than being thought foolish and skeptical, the Scripture calls them "noble."

Acts 17:11 (KJV)

These [Bereans] were noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

The Apostle Paul was intensely sincere in his desire to go to Jerusalem, and had persuaded himself that he was right. Although God warned him repeatedly not to go, he was determined that it was something he had to do, and he had his course of action well rationalized. Rationalization is quite different from rational thinking, however. When we rationalize, we start with our assumptions and then come up with reasons to do what we already want to do or did. Rational thinking is to think about one's course of action before acting based upon whether such action will be profitable, in one's best interests, the will of God, etc.

Acts 20:22-24 (KJV)

(22) And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

(23) Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

(24) But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Was he sincere? He certainly was, but he was also dead wrong, and nearly lost his life outside of God's will. He allowed himself to be deceived by his own sincerity. To the extent one believes something without evidence or justification but solely or primarily on the basis of sincerity, he acts irrationally. Had Paul been logical in his thinking at this point, he would have looked more objectively at his proposed course of action and weighed the benefits and the consequences before he made a decision. As it was, though, he erred because he so believed that he was right that he blinded himself to the many reasons that were presented to him not to go. He went "bound in the spirit," indicating that God was trying to tell him not to go. His illogical thinking, swayed by this fallacy of manner, prevented him from receiving the guidance he needed from God.

We can conclude from this and many other biblical records that logical thinking is often a necessary condition to receiving revelation. This means that we not be deceived by anyone's appearance or sincerity, even our own. Sometimes self-deception is difficult to overcome precisely because we are blinded by our own sincerity and "good intentions." Logical reasoning helps us get to the truth, however painful it may be in the short term.