

## In the Light of Logic

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher credited with the discovery of logic, built his understanding upon three fundamental “laws of thought.” They are so basic that one would think that they do not even need to be said. However, in recent years these principles have been under assault and dismissed by modern philosophers. Nevertheless, in my opinion they remain fundamental to the process of clear and sound thinking. They also represent the way of thinking that is most biblical and can be illustrated by the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Knowing these laws also helps us understand how Satan has so effectively “blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Cor. 4:4). What follows are calisthenics for the mind, and will strengthen our capacity for clear and rational thinking. We will be tempted to resist the mental discipline required to master these simple but important concepts, but doing so will enhance our capacity to discern truth and error. That, after all, makes the difference between freedom and bondage.

### The Law of Identity, or “Logical Identity”

This first law of thought asserted the existence of absolute truth, and stated that if a statement is true, then it is true. To state the law symbolically, A is A. It is not “true for you” or “true for me” in this absolute sense. We all know that there is a sense that we perceive things differently and therefore can construct alternative versions of reality, or “truth,” in the temporal sense. But in the pure or absolute sense, our perceptions are not “the Truth.” They are merely our perceptions. I may have my “truth,” you may have your “truth,” but God knows “*the* Truth.” Logic, the science of correct reasoning, depends upon the existence of “God’s truth,” or “Truth” with a capital “T.”

We employ this law of thought when we notice in scripture that there are two “robbers” (Gk. *lestai*) crucified with Christ in Matthew and two “malefactors” (Gk. *kakourgoi*) in Luke’s record. We then think “robbers are robbers and malefactors are malefactors. Maybe there is a reason two words are used and I shouldn’t assume they refer to the same pair.” Thinking in this way, we eventually come to the logical conclusion that there were four crucified with Christ.

Jesus basically employed this way of thinking when he asserted, in the face of a subtle form of trickery in Matthew 22:21 (KJV), “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” God is God. Caesar is Caesar. Soup is soup. A is A.

As an aside I should point out (as I love to do in this column) that it is common in our post-modern culture to hear people argue that “there is no truth.” Understanding this first law of thought, we see that they are actually affirming that there *is* truth in the absolute sense. Their statement constructs an argument that there is at least one truth: that *there is no truth*. In essence, what they are saying is, “It is true that there is no truth.” This kind of

statement is what is called “self-refuting.” It asserts something that it claims to deny. What could be more foolish?

It is interesting that the very nature of language shows it is designed to assist mankind in the determination of truth. The basic sentence in every language includes a subject and a predicate. A person, place or thing is put in one category or another. This is the essence of all judgment, good and bad. Marge is a gossip. It is hot out today. New Orleans is a decadent place. This soup is cold. Airline travel is boring. Elephants have big ears. The sky is blue. These are all examples of the everyday way we use language to frame and describe reality, or discern and express what we believe to be true. As we continue to interact with reality, our language changes to reflect our experience: “the sky appears blue except when it is obscured by clouds.”

Building upon this law of thought, “logical identity” is established by the following principle: If A and B are *identical*, whatever is true of A must also be true of B, and whatever is true of B must also be true of A. One point of dissimilarity disproves identity. If I am the author of this article and also the father of Nathan Laird Graeser of Indianapolis, Indiana, then whatever is true for the author of this article must also be true for the father of Nathan Laird Graeser of Indianapolis Indiana (I checked – he’s the only one). If the author of this article is 52 years old and bald, then the father of Nathan Laird Graeser must be 52 years old and bald.

The stakes get considerably higher when this principle is violated in connection with the identity of God. Scripture identifies the term “God” with the term “Father.” *God* is the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. That means that whatever is true of “God” (A) must also be true of “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (B). And whatever is true of “the Father of Jesus Christ” (B) must be true of “God” (A). Logically speaking, the term “God” cannot refer to *both* the Father of Jesus and Jesus himself, if language is to retain any meaning and purpose. Thus, Trinitarian thinking defies the most basic law of thought and breaks down the capacity of language to convey coherent thought. This is done supposedly to accommodate a “mystery,” but all it really does is destroy the integrity of language without which we have no hope of learning truth about God or anything else.

## **Law of Non-Contradiction**

This law is completely fundamental to logical and rational thinking, as every student of philosophy is taught. It states that “A” and “not A” cannot both be true at the same time and in the same relation. For instance, biologically speaking, Mark can be the father of his son Nathan and a son to his father Fred, but he cannot be biologically both a son and a father to the same person at the same time. So, regarding his relationship to his son Nathan, he cannot be both his son’s (biological) father and *not* his son’s biological father at the same time. He must be one or the other. Such is the reality of life.

This law of non-contradiction is often abandoned in theological discussions involving the Trinity or the natures of God and Christ. For instance, Jesus cannot be both man and

*not-man* at the same time and in the same relationship to what defines a man. If we define “man” in a way that makes “man” distinguishable from “God,” as a member of the species *homo-sapiens* with various physical and mental limitations, Jesus Christ cannot be a man and *not-man* at the same time. If he is “man” and “God” at the same time, and if we preserve the integrity of the definitions of these terms, Jesus becomes the incarnation of a logical contradiction. The only way out of this dilemma is to propose a third category of being called “God-man,” which by logical necessity renders him incapable of being included in either the category of “man” or “God.” Though some may find this theologically and mystically compelling, it is logically contradictory, if the integrity of biblical language is upheld (as in, “God is *not* a man” – Num. 23:19).

The concept of the “integrity of the Word of God” depends upon this principle of non-contradiction. The Bible says of itself that it is “given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). This statement cannot be both true and false at the same time. It cannot be inspired of God and not inspired of God at the same time. That is a logical impossibility. Not holding rigorously to this principle as a logical necessity when approaching the Word of God has caused people to accept error and contradictions in the Bible, rather than diligently seeking the answers to the apparent contradictions. In fact, many people’s thinking is so fuzzy and blinded that they cannot even see apparent contradictions at all. Sadly, many of these are very “religious” people. An awful lot of fuzzy thinking is cloaked in religious terminology.

Logically, if the Bible is what it claims to be (the Word of God), it can contain no errors, contradictions or lies. God cannot lie nor contradict Himself. And if the Bible is His Word then it cannot contradict itself either. It cannot be true *and* false. It must be one or the other. As Jesus said, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). This is the kind of rigorous logic that must be applied to the Bible. Its integrity is always hanging in the balance, because the slightest flaw, imperfection or contradiction renders the book a forgery, and it is found to be a lie and not what it claims to be – the truth.

### **The Principle of the Excluded Middle.**

The final law is the “Principle of the Excluded Middle.” This principle asserts that a statement in proposition form (A is B) is either true or false. There is no middle ground. If a statement is not completely true, then it is false. A “half-truth” is a lie. When applied to the Bible, it means that either all is God’s Word or none of it. There is no other logically tenable position.

Jesus affirmed this law of the excluded middle when he argued that “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Let us return to the example of the Trinitarian assertion that “Jesus is both God and man.” If words have meanings and “God” and “man” are not synonyms, then the statement “Jesus Christ is a man” is either true or false. To say he is both is a logical absurdity.

And we should also reconsider the statement of 2 Timothy 3:16 ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God") in light of the principle of the excluded middle. We will lay aside for the moment any possible arguments concerning the canon of scripture or the nature of inspiration. This statement ("All scripture...") is definitely in the Bible, a part of the whole. By sheer logic it must be either true or false. If it is false, then all scripture is *not* given by inspiration of God. In that case, at least two alternatives exist. Either *no* scripture is given by inspiration of God, or only *some* is inspired.

To say only "some" scripture is inspired puts one in a difficult position, because he is then stuck with the Herculean task of separating what is true from what is not without any consistent standard of judgment. Who is to say, coming to the book from the outside, what is inspired and what is not? Inspired verses do not show in red ink. If 2 Timothy 3:16 said "some scripture," then doubt would be cast on every verse in the Bible, for how is one to know whether a particular verse is part of the "some scripture" or not? The only logical attitude to hold about the Bible is the one dictated by the Principle of the Excluded Middle. Either it is *all* God's Word or none of it can be trusted. It is upon this logical bedrock that true Biblical research and teaching must be built.

The difficulty has been that people have not been as rigorously honest intellectually and logically with God's Word as they have been in other areas of life. In law, for instance, a man on trial for writing bad checks is innocent until proven guilty. He claims that he is innocent, that he has not written bad checks. In the course of the trial, however, it is proven by means of handwriting analysis and the type of ink that was used that it was not only his pen but his handwriting and in fact his signature. The bank testifies that he had no money in his account at the times the checks were written. The court finds the man guilty, fines him a tidy sum to cover the court costs and the amount of the bad checks, and sends him home (or to jail) with a stern reprimand. He lied by claiming that he had the money to back up his checks when he did not.

Once it had been proven that he lied and did not have the resources to back up his check, is there any point to keeping the check, framing it and looking at it once a week to admire the signature and the well-written letters in the words "ten thousand dollars"? Certainly not! And yet this is exactly what people have done with the Bible. They have denied the Bible's claim of divine authorship because of apparent discrepancies or contradictions. Yet they cannot bring themselves to send the Bible to "jail," so to speak, for being a fraud.

Because it contains so much practical wisdom and is incredibly useful and accurate as an historical document, its critics cannot bring themselves to utterly dispose of the book, because they know there is something there that makes it utterly unique among ancient literary artifacts. Yet to be logically consistent and honest, rendering the same justice in spiritual matters as in a court of law, the Bible must either be accepted for what it says it is, or if that can be disproved, thrown out altogether. It is dishonest to approach the Bible with any other attitude than what it demands, which is that it is the Word of God. To

approach it only as a good book or an historical document or a book of myths, accepting the parts one likes and disregarding the rest, is to show oneself a fool.

The Bible is very much like a check. If it is “signed” or underwritten only by man it is a fraud, a forgery and a lie and should be discarded as not worth the paper it is printed on. It is either one or the other – man's word or God's Word. Logically, it must either be believed and respected, or be thrown out. There is no middle ground. Without the Principle of the Excluded Middle, man's mind will forever sit on a fence that is not there, avoiding the demands of logical reasoning and the necessary research that would enable him to make an informed decision. He will come to God's Word full of his own opinions, ideas and doubts, instead of accepting it on its terms and considering the possibility that it is true.

While he attempts to judge the Word of God by human standards, man is judged already by the Word of God as an illogical fool. The fruit of such thinking is tyranny, arrogance, bondage and cruelty. Productive, logical thinking allows for the Word of truth to be rightly understood, and where there is truth believed there is true freedom, love and joy.