LOGICAL
fallacies

Does the truth of the Gospel negate the need for logic?

One of the major critiques to the realm of Christian apologetics goes as follows: "If salvation is by faith alone, then what's the point of trying to logically reason the truths of the Gospel with someone?" In short, if by faith, why logic? At its root, there is certainly a valid concern here. It is evident from Scripture that one can come to Christ only by faith in the Gospel (Eph. 2:8-9), and that we all naturally choose to live in darkened rebellion toward the light of the Gospel (Eph. 4:18-19). However, this does not dismiss our obligation to reason from the Scriptures with the "darkened" around us. For those of us who have "learned Christ," yes, we learned ultimately by faith, but it was not without reason. No, blind faith is actually the lot of the unbeliever.

What then are some logical mistakes that we can and should avoid when engaging an unbeliever with truth? Well, to keep things brief, let's just look at three types of logical fallacies and give a few examples.

First, we should be careful to be relevant in our reasoning with others. For example, have you ever felt backed into a corner in an argument and, rather than admitting your lack of knowledge, either thrown personal jabs or used argumentation that had little to do with the topic? This kind of argument is known as ad hominem.

Here's an example, using a fallacious syllogism:
  (1.) Jehovah's Witnesses argue against the deity of Jesus Christ.
  (2.) Jehovah's Witnesses would believe something so silly because they're a cult who has doctored the Bible to their own end, and they're just trying to work their way to heaven.
  (3.) Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses' view on Christ's deity is incorrect.

You may notice that in this scheme, the second proposition even has some elements of truth to it. Yes, the Watchtower Society has purposefully altered the Bible, and yes they have a false view of grace, but the argument itself doesn't actually address whether or not Jesus is God. It isn't to the point and sounds

downright arrogant. Actually, the Bible has much to say about Christ's deity, so it would be much more helpful to go there instead.

Secondly, we should make sure our arguments are clear and well-defined rather than ambiguous. Most of us have heard of the straw man argument, for instance. This is where the arguer misinterprets the opposing position or term to his favor.

Let's use "grace" as an example:
  (1.) Christians believe in grace.
  (2.) Grace means that God freely grants salvation to the believer and doesn't hold them responsible for how they live their lives.
  (3.) Grace results in licentiousness.

You will notice that the problem lies not so much in bad logic, but in bad definition. Conversely, we as Christians should seek to understand better what others believe so that we avoid misrepresenting them and thereby alienating them unnecessarily.

Finally, we should avoid the pitfall of presumption. Like the example above, a presumption isn't necessarily illogical in the technical sense; but because it is based on false assumptions, it is fallacious. One example of presumption is hasty generalization: drawing a conclusion from a unique circumstance.

Have you ever heard reasoning like this on the issue of baptism?
  (1.) The thief on the cross wasn't baptized before meeting Jesus in paradise.
  (2.) Therefore, Christians do not need to be baptized.

It would be incorrect to view baptism in a lesser light simply because of the example of the thief on the cross. The Bible actually places great importance on following Christ in believer's baptism. For all intents and purposes, it's a non-negotiable for the Christian.

Much more could be said on the topic of logic and faith, but perhaps it would be helpful to stop and consider how we converse or argue with the lost about the Christian faith. We should be careful to articulate the eternally solid truths of Scripture while avoiding personal attacks, presumptive arguments, and unclear definition. And when all is said, let us rest in this: that "the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21).

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