

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
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American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort
with all longsuffering
and doctrine.”

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Shall We Reason Together? Part Two: The Logic of Alogicality

Kevin T. Bauder

My parents used to send me to camp in the summer. That camp had a preoccupation with cabin cleanliness. Every day, the campers from the cleanest cabin were given special prizes and privileges. Naturally, the campers in my cabin wanted to win, so we cleaned the cabin scrupulously every morning.

One morning I was given the job of scrubbing the floor. Bucket and brush in hand, I started at the door where the light was best, and scrubbed my way back into the room. At nine years of age, I had not thought about the consequences of this method, nor did they occur to me until I had scrubbed myself into the far corner of the cabin. That was when I realized that I had no way out of the cabin except to deface the work that I had already done. I tried to think of an alternative, but in the end I had to track across the freshly-scrubbed floor, turning around to clean up my own mess on the way out.

Alogicality is like that. Those who hold the alogical philosophy scrub themselves into a logical corner. They have to maintain their philosophical position by appealing to the very principles that they reject. Their denial of reason is self-stultifying and oxymoronic.

What is alogicality? I have given this name to the philosophical position that denigrates the role of reason or logic in theology and morality. Alogicals take the slogan *Sola Scriptura* to an

unwarranted extreme. They deny that we may proclaim “Thus saith the Lord,” unless we have a direct, verbatim Scripture to quote.

I have previously stated that alogicality can be critiqued on several grounds. It is bad thinking, bad handling of Scripture, and bad theology. In this present essay, my objective is to show how alogicality is bad thinking. It is a bad philosophy.

Let’s begin by considering the act of reading. Alogicals seem to assume that reading is simply a matter of running their eyes over the words on a page, upon which meaning somehow (magically?) registers itself in their minds. They seem to believe that the transfer of meaning through the written page is automatic and intuitive.

Nothing could be further from the truth. When we read, we are constantly engaged in a process of drawing inferences. We observe words and phrases, and we infer that one is a subject, another is a predicate, and yet another is an object. We are constantly distinguishing nouns from verbs from modifiers from connectives. We reason that a particular sentence explains something, while another asks a question, and a third issues a command. We reason about the connection of words within a sentence, of sentences within a paragraph, and of paragraphs within a whole work.

If we are skilled in a language, we may draw all of these inferences so rapidly that they appear to be intuitive. When we engage in serious exegesis, however, we take these apparent intuitions and test them through a process of deliberate induction and analysis. Indeed, another name for our exegetical method is the inductive-analytical method.

This observation is too important to miss. All textual understanding—ALL of it—is the result of induction and analysis. This includes our understanding of the text of Scripture. We have never once understood any biblical proposition without engaging in a process of reasoning.

That being the case, we can never rightly oppose Scripture to reason. We can never suggest that we prefer the plain statements of Scripture to inferences drawn from the text. All of our understanding of Scripture, even of the plainest statements, is already and always a reasoned understanding. Always. Always. Always.

Therefore, to suggest that the statements of Scripture are somehow more authoritative than inferences drawn from those statements is, at best, horribly naïve. It is the position of a juvenile who has never reflected upon what she or he actually does when reading the Bible. When this position is pressed with an air of moral superiority, it becomes colossal arrogance. Alogicals elevate their own inferences to the level of biblical authority by simply refusing to recognize that they are inferences, while simultaneously denying anyone else’s authority to reason from the statements of Scripture.

Alogicality scrubs itself into a corner by constantly employing the very thing it despises. Alogicals reason, analyze, form inductions, and draw inferences all the time. They are constantly doing the very thing to which they object.

Their position is even worse than that, however. The core of the alogical position is that we ought not to treat inferences as if they were authoritative, either for doctrine or for morality. But notice that “ought.” By including that “ought,” alogicals are themselves assuming a moral pose. They are effectively saying, “It is *wrong* to impose moral requirements that are merely inferred from Scripture.”

In other words, alogicality is not merely a philosophical position. It is a moral position. It issues a moral demand. As with all moral demands, we have a right to ask the alogical, "What is your authority?"

Here is the grave difficulty with alogicality. Alogicals cannot produce a single statement of Scripture that requires their position in so many words. There is no verse in the Bible that says, "It is wrong to impose moral requirements that are merely inferred from Scripture." In order to sustain their own moral pose, alogicals are forced to draw inferences.

In other words, alogicality is not a biblical position, it is a philosophical one. Its core teaching is nowhere directly stated in the Bible. The core teaching is rather an inference that alogicals presume to draw from their understanding of *Sola Scriptura*. Alogicals scrub themselves into such a tight corner that their only way out is to trample all over their own central principle.

At the end of the day, alogicals find themselves in an unbecoming position. If they are right, then they are wrong. Their whole position relies upon doing the very thing that they say we must never do.

Of course, there is a darker possibility. For some, alogicality may not even be a bad inference. It may be a brute expression of prejudice. It is possible for an alogical to assert this prejudice without even the pretense of support.

But isn't there a name for that?

Alogicality is bad thinking. Because it is bad thinking, it is also bad morality. What remains is to show that it is bad exegesis and bad theology. ✖

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

A TRUE HYMN

George Herbert (1633)

My Joy, my Life, my Crown !
My heart was meaning all the day,
Somewhat it fain would say,
And still it runneth mutt'ring up and down
With only this, My Joy, my Life, my Crown.

Yet slight not these few words ;
If truly said, they may take part
Among the best in art :
The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords,
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.

He who craves all the mind,
And all the soul, and strength, and time,
If the words only rhyme,
Justly complains, that somewhat is behind
To make his verse, or write a hymn in kind.

Whereas if th' heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supply the want.
As when th' heart says (sighing to be approved)
O, could I love ! and stops, God writeth, Loved. ✕

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