

Logic: Its Nature and Purpose

(James Nance & Douglas Wilson)

God created man with the ability to reason: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 1:18). He did this so that we could communicate with Him and with one another. This enables us to love and obey Him. Reasoning means drawing proper conclusions from other information. A proper use of reason allows us to form rational statements, and to understand the statements that are made by others. It allows us, for example, to take universal statements such as “God has commanded all men everywhere to repent” and to apply them, first to ourselves and then to our neighbor: “We are men, therefore we must repent.” Without the ability to reason, we would be unable to discuss, preach, read, hear the gospel, or follow God’s commands. In other words, proper reasoning opens the mind so that it can close upon truth.

Some have assumed that this ability to reason is what constitutes man being created in the image of God. But there are several problems with this assumption. First, there are other creatures (like angels and cherubim) who have the ability to reason, but who do not bear the image of God the same way that man does. Another problem is that it implies that humans who are very young (e.g. a fertilized human ovum) or who are severely retarded cannot bear God’s image, or that they do so imperfectly. Rather than treating reason as the image of God in man, it would be far better to treat reason as a gift that God gives (out of his own nature and character) to all intelligent creatures. The more he gives, the greater our responsibility to love Him, as Scripture says, “with all our minds.”

Formal logic is the science and the art of reasoning well. As a science, logic includes discovering and identifying the patterns or rules by which we reason. As an art, logic teaches how to follow those rules, without abusing them in a wooden (and unreasonable) way. Logic is not devised by man, but neither is it created by God, like maple trees and dwarf stars are. Rather, it is an “attribute” of God which is reflected in creation. We need to be careful here, because it is not an attribute of God that is stated directly in Scripture, as His holiness, love, and righteousness are. But it is a characteristic of God that we see assumed everywhere in Scripture. We do not believe that logic is independent of God and *over* Him, which would mean that the triune God is not the sovereign God of the Bible. But neither do we believe that God could have created a nonsensical world where he was both the creator of it and not the creator of it. This leaves us with the assumption that all things are ultimately defined by God himself, rather than by “rules”. Since we want to learn how to reason as faithful Christians, we begin by assuming that all faithful thinking and reasoning is somehow sharing in this characteristic of God. So when we study logic faithfully, we are studying some of the divine reflection in the world around us.