

Literary Spectrum

The Writer's Thought Patterns

In a sense this is a continuation of last issue's article. As I implied then, reading good books is one important way of developing good thought patterns. It isn't the only way, however. Let's start off by talking about math for a bit.

Math and Logical Thinking

The Christian writer must learn to think logically. There are few better ways to teach logic than to teach algebra and geometry. When I taught school, I always taught these two subjects in grade nine and ten. I am dismayed at the amount of Christian schools today who drop these subjects in favor of bookkeeping or consumer math (or drop grade nine and ten altogether). I think this is one reason that we have so much trouble with shallow mindedness in the church.

Math is good for the thinking process because math has strict logical rules. If you are going to solve even a simple equation like $12+4-2\times5=y$ you need to know some rules. Follow the rules and you will see that $6=y$. Follow the sequence without rules and you will come up with $70=y$. That is quite a difference depending what you are trying to do.

Life has rules too. Life is logical. If you back off the porch you will fall, not float. Geometry especially is good for riveting this home. Christian writers must be able to think logically, or their stories and articles will not be sensible or Scriptural.

The Bible is Logical

The Bible has some very good examples of logical thinking. The first epistle of John is one of my favorite New Testament books. It is full of statements of logic.

For instance, one of the common statements of logic is the If – Then sequence. In other words, IF a given qualification is true, THEN something else is true. Or conversely, IF the given qualification is NOT true, THEN the "something else" is NOT true either. Let's look at an example in 1 John 1:7 where it states,

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Now let's rewrite this in logical form.

IF: we walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light, (ie. live in obedience)

THEN: we have fellowship with other Christians,

AND: we are cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ

Since that is true, the converse has to be true as well.

IF: we do NOT walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light, (ie. do not live in obedience)

THEN: we do NOT have fellowship with other Christians,

AND: we are NOT cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ

This is the conclusion that logical thinking forces us to come to. Yet too many people in the world today are trying to break up this logic and state it in the following way, instead.

IF: we do NOT walk in the light, as Jesus is in the light, (ie. do not live in obedience)

THEN: we can still have fellowship with other Christians,

AND: we are still cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ

AND: we still hope to get to heaven.

We cannot take this conclusion from this verse if we are honest. It is replacing logic with wishful thinking. If we would interpret natural laws the way some people interpret spiritual laws, we would all be able to fly, and we could all be millionaires, at a snap of a finger.

As a Christian writer you must learn to think logically, so that you can interpret both the Bible, and life in general, logically. You need to do this so that you can help your readers to come to logical conclusions when they read your stories and articles.

More Logic

Maybe this discussion is a bit too heavy or philosophical for some of you. But don't stop reading yet! Let's examine this a little further.

How can you make this practical in your writing? One of the very simple laws of logic in the Bible is the *law of sowing and reaping*. In literature this is called the *law of cause and effect*. In science it is one part of Newton's laws of inertia—to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. All three teach the same principles from different perspectives. The law of sowing and reaping is cause and effect. Since the one action grows out of the other, it is also action and reaction. No matter which way you state it, the Law operates exactly like we illustrated in the last section from 1 John.

Your stories must illustrate Biblical logic if they are to be useful. For instance—James seriously exaggerated while telling a story to his admiring friends. In other words, James lied (admit it, that's what it is). Telling a lie has repercussions. It is the sowing, it is the cause, it is the action, to use the terminology above. There will be a reaping, an effect, a reaction. What is it? You know what it is, if you have ever been caught like this. If you sow a lie, you reap guilt. If you do not clear it up, you may also reap a habit and, eventually, a destiny.

That is logic. If you let James off in your story, and manufacture another way out for him, then you break this logic, and you mislead your reader. A Christian writer may never do that. Study the Bible so you know Biblical logic, and then fearlessly proclaim it in your stories, not by being preachy but by showing your audience how it works. (Be sure to always test your logic by the Bible rather than test the Bible by your logic. Of course, the law of sowing and reaping isn't the only logic in the Bible, though it is very basic.)

Your Turn

Here are some exercises in logic for you to work out. These brief descriptions will tell you a lot about the person in focus. You finish the story. You cannot be this kind of person, or live this kind of life, without repercussion. What happens if we follow Biblical logic in these cases?

Finish them honestly.

1. Peter is in a hurry to get home from work. He is hungry and supper is waiting. So he deliberately drives 20 mph faster than the speed limit.
2. Susie is tired of making her dresses like her mother wants them. She deliberately decides that she is going to make this one different, no matter what.
3. Joseph loves music, especially classical music. But his congregation does not allow recordings with musical instruments. He feels that classical music is in a different category than country or rock, so he buys some classical recordings to listen to when he is by himself.
4. Jessica has an inner yearning for the world. She is outwardly obedient to her parents wishes, but she often speaks in glowing terms to her little sister Bethy, who sleeps with her, of worldly things she wishes she could.
5. Alicia feels spiritually immature. She decides to spend at least half an hour every day reading her Bible and praying.

--Lester Bauman

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