

# **Making the Irrational Rational**

## **Some Christian Syllogisms**

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### **Introduction:**

Christians have long pondered how to explain the gospel in a logical way. The nineteenth century Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, simply admitted that all religion, including the Christian religion, was illogical. In his *Journals* (1848), he wrote, “The problem is not to understand Christianity, but to understand that it cannot be understood.” To assert that Eternal Being could and would take physical shape in time, and allow itself to die a terrible death, was the “absolute paradox” according to Kierkegaard. That one could be infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, God and man at the same time, could only be impossible, illogical and absurd – an “offense” to human understanding.

What Kierkegaard called the “absolute paradox” results when reason collides with itself in logical contradictions. But according to Kierkegaard, this did not necessarily result in non-sense. Human reason must accept its limitations, the objective and empirical parameters of its capability, and allow the illogic of paradox to remain. When reason collides with something foreign, something outside of its realm of understanding, it must, to remain true to the scientific objective of seeking to know and perceive, admit and accept consideration of that which transcends its comprehension.

The supernatural “other” which reason collides with is revelation – the Self-revelation of a transcendent God who created human reasoning, transcends human reasoning, and surprises human logic with the revealing of Himself within the natural context. Reasoned Christian faith must, therefore, embrace the paradox of logical contradiction and the tension of dialectic, recognizing that Christianity will always be illogical and absurd when considered only at the level of natural, human logic. Human reasoning will always be insufficient for becoming or being a Christian, for it cannot comprehend what faith perceives and receives.

This “other” phenomenon of God’s Self-revelation in His Son, Jesus Christ, introduces a Theo-logic understanding wherein the existence, attributes, character and activity of God must be taken into consideration alongside of the natural phenomena which human reason evaluates. Christian faith goes beyond what human reason can conceive, for it transcends intellect alone by recognizing that the Transcendent God becomes immanently expressed within His creation. The objectivity of logic abides in dialectic tension with the subjectivity of living in the faith-receptivity of the living dynamic of the divine/human Lord Jesus. Christianity is not just adherence to a static and logical, epistemological belief-system of doctrine, but is the ontological reception of the Personal revelation of God’s Being in action in His Son.

The syllogisms of Christianity will remain unacceptable and illogical to anyone who is unwilling to admit, receive and experience the dynamic of such divine revelation. In fact, Theo-logic does not make the paradoxical absurdity of the Christian syllogisms reasonable by human logic. Christian faith constantly battles the “offense” of its syllogisms to human reason, and never goes beyond the tensions of dialectic. The “crunch” of logical absurdity and Theo-logic revelation provides the point of crisis that accepts doubt as the foundation of faith, develops humility in the inability of comprehension, and ultimately collapses in worship of the Revealed One in whom absolute knowledge and reality abide.

The objective of this study is to clearly state some of the basic Christian syllogisms of the Christian gospel, in order to note their contradictory incoherence as evaluated by human logic, and the explanation provided by the Theo-logic of revelation. Such an attempt will inevitably result in charges of promoting irrationality and denying the logical premises of Christianity by those who believe that Christianity can be figured out and explained in logical syllogisms. On the other hand,

the “natural man who does not understand spiritual things” (I Cor. 2:14), believing that empirically based evidence evaluated by human logic is the sole basis of knowledge, will also object to the Theo-logic of divine revelation.

## **Syllogism #1**

**He began to exist at a particular time.  
He existed prior to that time.**

As it stands, the two premise statements are illogical. The only conclusion to be drawn is that they are logically contradictory. That one should begin to exist who had already existed impinges upon the logic of sequential time events and the commencement of existence within such time. To state the syllogism in another way does not decrease the contradiction:

**He was born in the days of Herod.  
He existed prior to the days of Herod.**

Historical narratives in the Christian scriptures certainly support the first statement. Luke writes of the details surrounding Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem (Lk. 2:1-20). Matthew adds details about the Magi approaching Herod, and the flight to Egypt (Matt. 1:18–2:23). Paul explained to the Galatians that “in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). The historical phenomenon of Jesus’ birth is also supported in some non-Biblical literature.

The second premise, that Jesus existed prior to the time of Herod, has scriptural support also. John explained that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1,2), ... “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Jesus declared to the Jewish leaders, “Before Abraham came into being, I AM” (John 8:56). In His prayer to the Father, Jesus referred to “the glory I had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:5). Explaining that “all things were created by Him” (Col. 1:16), Paul continued to affirm that “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

Despite scriptural support for both premise statements, they remain self-contradictory when considered only with natural human logic, operating with the empirical criterion of containment within space/time context. Personal and eternal preexistence is not fathomable within the space/time parameters of natural logic. Only with Theo-logic, which takes into account the supernatural, the spiritual, the reality of an eternal God, can one accept divine preexistence. Christians have done themselves a disservice by continuing to explain eternity merely as the extension of time with “no beginning and no end,” and the commencement or occurrence of events on an extended time-line. This explanation accommodates natural logic, but fails to explain the fullness of the personal presence and activity of the divine “Eternal Now” as He reveals Himself continuously within the context of time. To affirm that eternity enters into temporality, that infinity engages finiteness and spatiality, that Deity intersects with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, requires Theo-logic presuppositions.

To avoid the self-contradiction of the statements of the above stated syllogism, some within church history have employed varying methods of reductionism of the premise statements. Within Gnostic thought the theory of Docetism was developed, the reductionist explanation that Jesus only “appeared” (Greek word *dokein* = “to appear”) to be human. The first premise, that “Jesus was born in the days of Herod,” is thus reduced by denying that Jesus was truly human. The Ebionites denied the second premise, that “Jesus existed prior to Herod,” and thereby effectively denied the Deity of Jesus. The personal and eternal preexistence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit will never be a conclusion drawn or accepted by natural human logic. Only the Theo-logic that accepts and experiences the Self-revelation of eternal Trinity will suffice to affirm that the Son of God eternally preexisted as God and was “made flesh” as man.

Orthodox Christian teaching affirms that the Son of God did exist before Herod (as God), and Jesus did not exist before Herod (as man), but He began to exist at the time of Herod (as God-man). We must question whether this affirmation is an improper equivocation using different categories of qualification? No. It is entirely legitimate to qualify logical statements in such a way that their logical contradiction is removed. But the parenthetical qualifications stated above still do not remove the logical contradiction, for the resultant premises deal with distinct categories of deity and humanity (and the union thereof), and the category of deity is necessarily denied by empirical logic. Orthodox Christian teaching, employing both natural logical and Theo-logic, affirms that the two categories of being, the two natures of deity and humanity, came together in union in the single person of Jesus Christ.

Unable to accommodate the logical inconsistency of deity and humanity being brought together in one person, the Nestorians suggested that Jesus was a dual personality with both a divine person and a human person embodied in one entity. The Christological union was thereby reduced to only a relational union wherein the two alleged persons related to one another, similar to a husband and wife relationship. Eutychianism, on the other hand, affirmed the singularity of Jesus' person, but reduced the union to two parts, wherein Jesus was part God and part man, similar to a mythical centaur which is part man and part horse. Neither of these attempts to resolve the incongruity of the union of deity and humanity in one person is acceptable.

The union of deity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, is unlike any other union. The singularity of the Christic union is such that all attempts to make analogous comparisons will always result in inadequate conceptions and explanations, as is also true with the distinction and union dialectic of the Trinity. Christians must accept the irresolvable logical paradox, while simultaneously affirming the Theo-logic of the hypostatic union of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The singular historic person of Jesus was "truly God" and "truly man."

## Syllogism #2

Here we introduce another syllogism that might be regarded as a variant of syllogism #1.

**He became what He was not before.  
He did not cease to be what He was before.**

The logical contradiction of the first syllogism is not mitigated by the second. The two premise statements of this syllogism are equally as contrary and dissonant as were those of the previous syllogism. Logicians must assess the statements as self-contradictory.

Although this syllogism retains the elements of priority and commencement within time, it adds the ontological elements of being and becoming. The apostle John explains, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). The Word (Greek *logos*), the expressive agency of God's Self-revelation, came into being as a man. The Son of God, the second person of the Godhead "became what He was not before." Only by the Theo-logic that recognizes the eternal preexistence of the Son of God as God can we legitimately seek to explain that the eternal Son of God did not cease to be what He was before, i.e. God, when He became what He was not before, i.e. the God-man. The incarnational enfleshment of the second Person of the Triune Godhead was an ontological becoming wherein the preexistent Son of God became God-man. Prior to His "becoming flesh" He was the eternal Son of God, which He did not cease to be when He became a man, but He was only God-man from the time of the historical occurrence of the incarnation.

A word of explanation is in order concerning the designation of the second person of the Triune God as the "Son of God." Human logic can only conceive of a "son" as the product of the procreated procession from a father. A father generates a son via procreation, and the son proceeds from the seminal transmission of the father in such procreation. Natural logic cannot conceive it otherwise. The father precedes the son, and the son proceeds from the father. There was a time when the father existed, and the son did not. Theo-logic recognizes the absurdity of any other

explanation, but affirms that the anthropologically relational terms of “father” and “son” are utilized in reference to the persons of the Godhead, not in any biological way, but only in terms of their personal relation and function. Physical analogies of paternity and sonship are not valid when applied to the Godhead. Orthodox Christian teaching explains that the Father, Son and Spirit have existed eternally as Three-in-One Trinity. When John refers to “the only begotten Son of God” (cf. John 1:14; 3:16,18; I Jn. 4:9) or to “the only begotten God” (John 1:18), these phrases are not referring to substantive biology, but to functional relation. Through the centuries Christians teachers have referred to “the eternal generation of the Son” to explain the eternally existent relation of Father and Son. This is why Athanasius objected so vehemently to the heretical statement of Arius, “There was a time when the Son was not,” for he was fully aware that such reasoning implied that the Son was a created being who was not “truly God,” and was not eternally preexistent with the Father. Arianism was repudiated at the Council of Nicea in AD 325.

The Son of God, the Word, “was in the beginning with God, and was God” (John 1:1). In becoming flesh (John 1:14), He became what He was not before (God-man), but did not cease to be what He was before (Son of God). The process by which He became the God-man was not by absorbing one property into the other, or by “morphing” from one to the other. The traditional explanation has been that the Son of God “assumed” humanity in order to become the God-man. Such language can be misleading. To “assume” means “to take on,” but it cannot mean “to put on,” or don, or to wear like a cloak, else we lapse into the role-playing of appearances in Docetism. If “assume” means “to take on” in the sense of “add to,” allowing for two distinct properties or persons in a “combo-man,” we revisit Nestorianism. Some theologians have over-generalized the incarnation by using familiar phrases such as “God became man” or “deity became humanity.” In so doing the meaning of “assumed” is sometimes interpreted as God’s “subsuming” humanity within Himself, or “consuming” humanity into Himself, and this can lead to the conclusion that all humanity is drawn into God in universalism. Orthodox Christian teaching has always maintained that the Word, the Son of God, in becoming “flesh” became a single, individuated person, who was the God-man. In the hypostatic union two diverse natures, or properties, or categories of being, were conjoined in one individual or person (Greek *hypostasis*; Latin *personae*).

Paul’s words to the Philippians provide Christological explanation, but have often raised more questions than logical answers. The Son of God, Christ Jesus, preexisted “in the form (Greek *morphe*) of God” (2:6). As God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24) and does not have an external, tangible or spatial “form,” this must refer either to an ontological form or a functional form, rather than to a substantive form. Having the ontological Being of God, the Son functioned as God, doing what He did because He was who He was – His own Being in action, but always in perichoretic concert with the Father and the Spirit. Within that divine “form” of ontological function, “He did not regard equality with God a thing to be held on to” (2:6). While essentially equal with God the Father in the Trinity of the Godhead, this divine oneness could not be severed or disengaged. Essential equality was an eternal constant, but the functional equality of Self-generative action out of divine Being need not be “held on to” or “grasped” in some kind of “equal rights” assertion. Therefore, He “emptied Himself” of this aforementioned functional equality (more later), “taking the form (Greek *morphe*) of a bond-servant” (2:7). Again, the “form” of a bond-servant is not a particular spatial conformation or configuration, but must be understood as the “functional form” of one who is subordinated, dependent and contingent upon another. Voluntarily disengaging from the Self-generated expression of divine action, the Son of God “was made,” became (same verb as in John 1:14), was brought into being, “in the likeness of men” (2:7). “Likeness” must not be regarded as mere similitude or semblance that would constitute Jesus as less than “truly man.” When man was created in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1:26,27), it was not that man had a similarity or resemblance to God, but that man was capable of functionally and visibly expressing the invisible character of God as he remained dependent to derive from the indwelling presence of God (Gen. 2:7). When “found in appearance as a man” (2:8), Jesus was not a generic personification of humanity, but a single individuated person. His “appearance” as a man was not

an illusory perception. Paul does not employ the Greek word *dokein* from which we get Docetism, but uses the word *schema* which refers to the functional “scheme” of human conduct. This entire passage (2:5-8), inserted within the context of practical and functional behavior, emphasizes the function of the God-man, leading up to the human choice of His “humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (2:8). The functional focus of Paul’s Christological passage leads to another syllogism that relates to the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the God-man.

### Syllogism #3

**He could *be* God and *be* man at the same time.  
He could not *behave* as God and *behave* as man at the same time.**

This syllogism is stated by W. Ian Thomas in his book, *The Mystery of Godliness*. The context of Thomas’ argument is that the life that Jesus lived is the same life that is re-presented in the Christian.

The first premise statement remains contrary to the logical reasoning that the attributes of divinity and humanity are mutually incompatible. Via the presuppositions of Theo-logic, we have explained (in syllogisms #1 and #2) how they are brought together in the hypostatic union of the God-man.

A subordinate syllogism should be considered prior to an evaluation of the correlation of the two premise statements of syllogism #3.

**Man cannot be God.  
Jesus was a man who claimed to be God.**

The Creator-God did not create the creature-man in such a way that man could become God, or be a god. God did not create man as a lesser god who could aspire to be God. When God created out of Himself (Greek *ek theos* - cf. Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 8:6), He did not create reproductions of Himself. God created out of Himself that which was not Himself; the Greater creating the lesser, a creature who was to be dependent and contingent upon Himself. This awareness of anthropological dependency to derive from a spiritual source beyond himself is the absolute denial and rejection of the humanistic premise, the fallacy first suggested by the serpent in the garden, “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). Orthodox Theo-logic will not entertain any humanistic, mystical or heretical claims that man can be God.

Man cannot be God, but Jesus was a man who claimed to be God. We have another case of logical inconsistency. Jesus was “truly man” (cf. Matt. 1:1-17; Acts 2:22; I Tim. 2:5) who claimed to be “truly God” (cf. John 8:56; 10:30). C. S. Lewis observed that this dilemma allows for only three options:

(1) Knowing that He was not God, Jesus nevertheless claimed to be God, in which case He was a ***deceitful liar***.

(2) Though He was not God, Jesus thought Himself to be God, in which case He was a ***deranged lunatic***.

(3) Knowing that He was the God-man, Jesus claimed to be God, in which case He was who He claimed to be, the ***Divine Lord***.

Only by the Theo-logic that we have applied to the first two syllogisms of this study can we rationally admit that despite the fact that man cannot be God, the Son of God was God prior to becoming the God-man, “truly God and truly man.” As the God-man, functioning as a man, He had every right to claim to be God. He is indeed the Divine Lord!

Now we can return to the functionality of the God-man, as stated in the second premise of syllogism #3. Once again, there is a basic illogic in the attempted conjoining of the two premises

statements of this syllogism. It is no more logical than the previous syllogisms.

God always acts like the God that He is. He acts out of His own Being, and He cannot do otherwise. Is it possible that God could cease to act or behave as God? Can anyone limit or cause the cessation of God's activity? Logic says "no," but Theo-logic must admit that God Himself can Self-limit His own action, and choose not to act out of His own divine Being in the non-use of His own expressed action. Although He cannot act contrary to His own absolute character, He can choose not to act. Such Self-limitation is obvious in God's creation of the rational and volitional choosing creatures of humanity. Choosing not to impose Himself upon man, He chose to limit and not use His power to act, in order to allow man to have a freely chosen faith-love relationship with Himself.

Recognizing this divine ability for Self-limitation, we can proceed to examine the second premise statement of the third syllogism: "He (Jesus) could not *behave* as God and *behave* as man at the same time." Divine function and human function are mutually incompatible.

Divine function, as indicated previously, is Self-generative action. God is autonomous and independent, and when He acts He acts out of His own Being (*ek theos*). All that He does is His own Being in action expressing His own character. God *does* what He *does* because He *is* Who He *is*. Who God *is* only God *is*. What God *does* only God *does*. God alone can act in the expression of the character of His own godliness.

Human function, on the other hand, is dependent, derived and contingent action. Man cannot self-generate action and character out of himself (*ek autos*), as a self-generative god. The human creature was designed to be receptive to, and dependent on, God. The fallacy of humanism is that man is capable to *be* whatever he desires to *be*, and *do* whatever he desires to *do*. "Do your own thing." "You can do it!" "Just do it!" "You can be the cause of your own effects, the self-help solution to your own problems (should you have any, and admit to such), and the master of your own fate." What a lie foisted upon human thinking ever since Eden. Man *does* what he *does* only as he derives from a spiritual source – either God or Satan, *ek theos* or *ek diabolos* (cf. I Cor. 2:12; I John 3:10; 4:6). Fallen man hates to admit his human dependency, and Christians have capitulated in their hesitancy to admit diabolic derivation (cf. Jn. 8:44; II Tim. 2:26; I Jn. 3:8).

The function of God and man are mutually exclusive. God *does* what He *does* because He *is* Who He *is* – doing what He does Self-generatively out of Himself. Man *does* what he *does* derivatively – choosing to receive the character of his activity from a spiritual source.

Now we are prepared to consider what Paul meant when he wrote that the preexistent Son of God who was essentially and functionally equal with God, "emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7) in order to become a man and function as a man. What did He empty Himself of? Kenotic theories (Greek word for "emptying" is *kenosis*) have abounded with explanations that the Son of God emptied Himself of divinity (cf. John 10:30), of divine glory (cf. John 1:14), or various omni-attributes (omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience). Suffice it to say that the Son of God could not and did not empty or divest Himself of His essential ontological Being as God, or any part thereof. He could, however, empty Himself of the divine right and prerogative as God to function as God, in order to subordinate Himself and function as a man. This He did by choosing to Self-limit Himself by the non-use of His Self-generative divine function, in order to function in the subordinated form of a human bond-servant, willing to be dependent and contingent upon God the Father. The God-man remained "truly God and truly man" – never less that God in His essential Being, and never more than man in His derived functional action.

Another subordinated syllogism reveals the natural illogic of the argument being made:

**God does everything at His own initiative.  
Jesus said, "I do nothing of My own initiative."**

The only logical conclusion to be drawn from these statements is, "Therefore, Jesus is not God." Only by the Theo-logic that we have applied to the previous syllogisms can we recognize that God functions by doing everything out of His own Self-generative initiative and efficiency,

whereas the human creature was designed to receptively derive from another. God's Self-generative function of grace is to be received in man's response of faith. Jesus repeatedly declared, "I do nothing of My own initiative" (John 5:19,30; 8:28; 12:49). In the upper room Jesus told His disciples, "I speak nothing of My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (John 14:10). Jesus, the God-man, functioned as a man who submitted to His Father, saying, "Not My will, but Thine be done" (Matt. 26:39; Lk. 22:42). For every moment in time for 33 years, Jesus, who was "truly God," functioned as a man who let God function as God in the man, and was thereby a man as God intended man to be.

Another series of subordinated syllogisms may be stated in our continued explanation of Jesus' function as a man.

**God cannot be seen or touched.  
Jesus was seen and touched.**

Again, the logical conclusion to be drawn from the correlation of these premise statements is, "Therefore, Jesus was not God." Theo-logic demands that we qualify these statements with the recognition that a singularity has occurred whereby the Son of God has become the God-man in the incarnation.

God, as Spirit (Jn. 4:24), cannot be seen or touched, for He does not have corporeality or tangible, visible form. "No man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18; I John 4:12), for He is "invisible" (I Tim. 1:17).

The Son of God, as God-man, was visible in His incarnated enfleshment. Jesus was beheld (John 1:14; I John 1:1,2) and touched (Lk. 4:46; 24:39; I Jn. 1:1), appearing physically to more than 500 at one time following His resurrection (I Cor. 15:6).

This syllogism has feasible explanation only when the deity and humanity of the God-man are properly viewed with the distinction of their essentiality and functionality.

**God cannot be tempted.  
Jesus was tempted in all points as we are.**

Scripture clearly states that "God cannot be tempted by evil" (James 1:13). The narratives of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13), and the temptation to react to His unjust sufferings (cf. Matt. 27:39-44; Heb. 2:18), reveal that "He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

This syllogism, as it stands, leads only to the natural logical conclusion that, "Jesus was not God." To avoid such a conclusion some theologians have gone to great convoluted lengths to assert the impeccability of Jesus, emphasizing that Jesus, because He was God, could not be tempted to sin. In so doing, they diminish the humanity of Jesus, failing to recognize that Jesus was functioning as a man during His temptations, and they make the temptations of Jesus into a charade of staged play-acting. Only by the Theo-logic of the incarnated God-man functioning as a derivative individual man can the temptations of Jesus be understood as legitimate solicitations to a man who could and did make the choices of faithful obedience.

**God cannot die.  
Jesus was put to death.**

The living God (Matt. 26:63; Rom. 9:26; Heb. 9:14), who has life in Himself (John 5:26), is immortal (I Tim. 1:17; 6:16), and cannot die. The God-man, Jesus, was "truly man" to the extent that He could and did experience physical death (Matt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30).

This syllogism, like the ones that immediately precede it, can only allow for the conclusion that "Jesus was not God." The human incarnation of the Son of God is the only explanation for the possibility and beneficence of the crucifixion of Jesus. Functioning as man, Jesus made the

responsible choices to be “obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8). Though the Roman authorities and the Jewish peoples of Israel conspired together to execute Jesus by crucifixion (Acts 4:27), He did not die as an overpowered victim, but in accord with the predestined purpose of the Godhead (Acts 4:28), and by the human choice to submit to such death. Jesus declared, “I lay My life down that I may take it up again. No one can take it from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative” (John 10:17,18). The death of Jesus was not a random killing. He died for a purpose. His objective was stated, when He said, “I came to give My life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

This leads to another syllogism concerning Jesus’ death.

## Syllogism #4

**Death is the consequence of sin.  
Jesus died, having no sin.**

This syllogism allows for no conclusion other than the recognition that the statements pose a contradiction. The contradiction of the redemptive death of Jesus cannot be understood by natural logic, but only to the extent that Theo-logic reveals God’s purposes.

God advised the original couple that the disobedience of partaking of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9,17) would have consequences. “In the day that you eat of it, dying you will die” (Gen. 2:17). If original man were to reject the “tree of life” and the divine outworking of the divinely inbreathed life of God (Gen. 2:7), then the contingent and derivative function of man would necessarily allow for the overtaking of mankind by the “one having the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). After Adam and Eve disobeyed, the resultant spiritual death allowed the degenerative process that led to physical death (Gen. 5:5). The one man, Adam, represented all men, seminally and spiritually, and by his disobedience all within the human race were “made sinners” (Rom. 5:19) spiritually, and “death spread to all men” (Rom. 5:12), reigning in mankind who were all spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1,5). To counter this situation of misused and abused humanity, the Triune Godhead determined in love (Jn. 3:16) to send the second Person, the Son of God, to be a perfect man who “might taste death for every one” (Heb. 2:9). Though the human Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), He was perfect in spiritual being, born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23), without the transmission of spiritual death. The “ruler of this world had nothing in Him” (Jn. 14:30), and He could behave in such a way as to “always be pleasing to the Father” (Jn. 8:29), deriving all from the Father (Jn. 14:10) for every moment in time for 33 years. His behavior choices were such that He was perfectly righteous, “having no sin” (II Cor. 5:21; I Jn. 3:5), and as such qualified to be the perfectly sufficient sacrifice to take an undeserved death for the sins of all mankind.

The second statement of the syllogism, “Jesus died, having no sin,” explains that though Jesus was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15) in His behavioral choices, He was willing to incur the death consequences that occurred in Adam (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12-21), that “through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Vicariously and substitutionally, Jesus took the death consequences of sin upon Himself, and was “made to be sin” (II Cor. 5:21) in order to “destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn. 3:8). “Christ died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God” (I Pet. 3:18). From the cross He cried, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), for He had “accomplished the work He was sent to do” (Jn. 17:4).

Since He was sinless, “it was impossible for Him to be held in death’s power” (Acts 2:24). By the resurrection display of life out of death, the risen Lord Jesus made His life available to those receptive in faith (Jn. 1:12). Redemption was for the purpose of man’s regeneration and restoration. Jesus did not come only to die (Matt. 20:28), but He “came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). This spiritual re-living of man with the life of the Triune God is illustrated as a new birth (John 3:3-8), whereby “we are born again to a living hope through the



resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Pet. 1:3). Receiving the Son, we have life (I Jn. 5:12), and Christ becomes our life (Col. 3:4), allowing Christians to “reign in life through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17) as “grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21).

## Syllogism #5

**We become what we were not before.  
We do not cease to be what we were before.**

This syllogism may appear similar to the Christological statements of syllogism #2, but entirely different realities are being stated. This syllogism pertains to those who are Christians, addressing the subsequent condition of those who have been regenerated by the receiving of divine life. As stated, the two statements are again illogical due to their apparent contradiction, but Theologic provides explanation of spiritual realities which natural logic cannot consider.

As Christians, “we become what we were not before.” The spiritual condition of the Christian is such that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (II Cor. 5:17). We have “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), allowing for a new spiritual identity as “Christ-ones,” Christians, who are “in Christ,” being “joined in one spirit with Him” (I Cor. 6:17). As “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), we are considered spiritually righteous (Rom. 5:19; II Cor. 5:21), holy (Col. 1:22) and perfect (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 12:23), deriving such spiritual character identity from the indwelling presence of the righteous, holy and perfect Trinity. The risen Christ has become our life (Col. 3:4), and we can say with Paul, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

In “becoming what we were not” prior to our spiritual regeneration, the Christian personally experiences a new spiritual condition. This does not mean that the Christian becomes God, or becomes Christ, or becomes Holy Spirit in some form of monistic merging or absorption. Some have so emphasized the first premise to the denial of the second. Even the Eastern Orthodox churches who refer to the deification of *Theosis*, indicate that the Christian does not become essentially divine, but participates in the energies of the divine life of the Trinity.

Though “we become what we were not before, we do not cease to be what we were before.” How can this be? “All things have become new” (II Cor. 5:17) in terms of our spiritual condition, but the Christian remains a human being. In like manner as the non-Christian is not to be considered sub-human, neither is the Christian to be considered super-human. We do not want to lapse into Platonic and Gnostic dualism, or engage in mystical flights, thinking that we can transcend our humanity and be “no longer human.” The Christian continues to function spiritually, psychologically and physiologically as a human person. As a contingent and dependent human, the Christian remains a responsible choosing creature, responsible to be receptive in faith to derive character expression from the divine presence within. In the midst of the common trials of life (I Cor. 10:13), the Christian continues to be tempted by the tempter (I Thess. 3:5), and should not expect to be exempt from such temptation. Vulnerability to such temptation is intensified by the residual patterns of active and reactive selfishness and sinfulness that remain in the behavior mechanism of the Christian’s soul. The behavioral conflict of “the flesh setting its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit setting its desire against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17) is a constant crucible in the Christian life. When the Christian succumbs to temptation and “lives according to the flesh” (Rom. 8:12,13), he misrepresents his spiritual identity “in Christ,” and sins. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (I Jn. 1:8).

The contradiction of this syllogism becomes a dialectic that must be kept in tensioned balance in Christian thought. Protestant Christianity, in general, has shied away from, or sometimes completely denied, the first premise statement. In an overly objectified understanding of the condition of righteousness as a standing or status forensically or juridically declared by God, and conferred by legal imputation to the believer, Protestant theologians have emphasized a concept of

“alien righteousness” that disallows that the Christian can subjectively “become what he was not before.” Instead, they have often emphasized that the Christian “does not cease to be what he was before,” a depraved and vile sinner with a deceitfully wicked heart (cf. Jere. 17:9), a no good worm of a creature, “just a sinner saved by grace.” Sinful behavior is justified by the excuse, “I am only human,” and “the old sinful nature gets the best of me sometimes.” What an inadequate understanding of spiritually regenerated “saints” of God, and the resource we have received in Christ to live as He lived.

## Syllogism #6

**Righteousness is by faith apart from works.  
Faith apart from works of righteousness is impossible.**

Throughout the history of Christian thought many have regarded this as a syllogism of contradictory premises posed by the New Testament statements of the apostles Paul and James. Writing to the Romans, Paul explained that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:28), for “God reckons righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:6). James, on the other hand, wrote that “faith, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17,260; “faith without works is useless” (James 2:20). How can the premise that “faith is antithetical to works” be reconciled with the premise that “faith must be accompanied by works”?

Martin Luther could not resolve the contradiction of these statements in his own mind, so he settled only on Paul’s statements and repudiated James’ writing as “an epistle of straw,” relegating it to the back of his German translation of the New Testament. Accepting the motto of *sola fide* in his theological theme of “justification by faith alone, apart from works,” Luther refused to accept the tension of the Biblical syllogism. The conundrum created by this expedient unwillingness to maintain Biblical balance has created a polemic theological rift between Protestants and Roman Catholics for almost five centuries.

Clarification of the two premise statements requires recognition of their contextual intent in the writings of Paul and James to avoid the proverbial comparison of apples and oranges. The first premise statement was used by Paul to refer to the righteousness made available to man by God’s grace without any contributory or meritorious works on man’s part, but solely accepted by faith in Jesus Christ for initial personal conversion. The second premise statement has its context in James’ argument that without the expressed works of behavioral righteousness within the Christian life, faith is rendered meaningless and useless. The apparent antinomy of the two statements is further mitigated by seeking redefinition of the terms, allowing them to be filled with the dynamic meaning of new covenant Theo-logic which takes into account the singularity of the greatest phenomenon in the temporal universe – the restoration of God to man in Jesus Christ.

Both Roman Catholic theology and Protestant theology have suffered from an undue legal and juridical contextualization of justification/righteousness. Luther’s emphasis on the first premise of the syllogism cast justification into a static and over-objectified category of legal declaration of the imputed righteousness of Christ, which allowed the believer to have a right standing and status in the sight of God. Subjective, ongoing implications of righteousness were denied for the most part. Catholic theology recognized justification/righteousness as a process that involved both objective and subjective elements, but often allowed the concept of legal obedience to the laws of god and the church to cast righteousness into humanistic forms of self-generated righteousness that contributed to conversion and sanctification. The revelation of Theo-logic recognizes that righteousness is essentially the character of God, and its expression (objective or subjective) is always derived from God, *ek theos*. Christians are not just “declared righteous,” which by itself can become an abstracted and meaningless legal fiction, but they are also subjectively “made righteous” (Rom. 5:19; II Cor. 5:21), allowing for the divine expression of God’s righteous character in Christian behavior (Rom. 6:13-19; James 2:21-25; 3:18), neither of which is a meritorious or contributory self-righteousness.

Protestant aversion to “works” in reference to righteousness is a repudiation of meritorious human effort or performance that serves to appease, please, or derive benefit from God. Scripture is clear that grace (Rom. 11:6), righteousness (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:21), salvation (Eph. 2:8; II Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5), and the receipt of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2) are “not of works” that man can muster up and perform. But Protestant repudiation of human “works” as having any contributory efficacious benefit for objectified right-standing with God has left them open to the charge of antinomian libertinism that minimizes ethical expression in “good works” of righteous character in human behavior. Post-reformation Catholic theologians chided Protestants with the barb, “If ever a Protestant were to exhibit righteousness in behavior, it would of necessity have to be by ‘works’ for they allow no subjective provision for the manifestation of righteous character.” They had a legitimate point. The misunderstanding of James’ premise that “faith without works is dead, impotent or vacuous,” has disallowed Protestants a full recognition of the glorious out-working of the righteous character of God in human behavior, as displayed in “good works” which God “prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10), and which God works in us (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21). Catholic theology, on the other hand, has often fallen prey to the charge of humanistic potentialism in regarding human performance of “works” to be contributory and meritorious within a legalistic context of obedience.

Varying perceptions of “faith” are the greatest issue in the resolution of this syllogism and the reconciliation of Catholic and Protestant theological positions. Faith is often perceived by both Catholics and Protestants as a cognitive mental assent to historical records of events and to theological formulations of doctrines. Intellectual acceptance of the truth statements of the kerygmatic message is a first step of faith, but faith must not be confined to a belief *credo*, nor limited to concurrence with and being convinced of static sentential book statements, making the Bible the object of faith (as Protestants have been the most guilty of). When “faith” is defined as trusting reliance and devoted loyalty, as the Greek word *pistis* and the Latin word *fides* were commonly used – “taking another at his word,” the personal element of fiduciary relationalism enhances the awareness of a confident and devoted social and spiritual commitment wherein there is integrity, credibility, fidelity, and loyalty. Roman Catholics have insisted on a “formed faith,” *fides formata*, which takes into account the second premise of the stated syllogism, recognizing that it must be “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6), whereas Protestants have focused on an abstracted faith without form, *fides informis*, in an overly objectified and impersonal understanding of “faith” as stated in the first premise.

Whereas the vocabulary of new covenant thought necessitates the redefining of terminology to convey the singularity of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the word “faith,” along with many other Christian words, must be recast in an explanation that accounts for the dynamic of God’s grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). New covenant faith is man’s response of receptivity to God’s activity. John wrote, “To as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who *believe* in His name” (Jn. 1:12). Paul asks the Galatians, “Did you *receive* the Spirit by works, or by hearing with *faith*?” (Gal. 3:2), expecting confirmation that the Spirit of Christ was *received* by faith. “As you received Christ Jesus (by faith), so walk in Him (by faith)” (Col. 2:6), Paul admonished the Colossians. Initially (cf. first premise), the believer is receptive to the historical and redemptive activity of Jesus Christ for objective justification, reconciliation, and adoption, as well as for the subjective revitalization of spiritual regeneration. The continuum (cf. second premise) of the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) and “walk of faith” (Col. 2:6) in the expression of “good works” involves the receptivity of the divine activity of the living Lord Jesus expressing His character in our behavior – “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

Despite the reformation motto of *sola fide*, faith never “stands alone” as a separate entity or virtue. Faith is nothing in itself, for it is but the choice of reception that allows God to be active in our lives. Faith does not DO anything, as it is but the open hand of reception for God’s DOING. Faith is not the causative source or agent of any action, since it has no auto-generative capability for enacting character or behavior. On the other hand, faith does not allow for passivity, inertia, or

idleness. By definition, “our receptivity of God’s activity,” faith will facilitate an inevitable expression of divine activity. Faith must be demonstrated, not by our self-generated doing of “good works,” but always by what God is doing in the expression of His love and goodness – His activity of grace in Jesus Christ.

## Syllogism #7

**God alone can express His character of godliness.  
“Discipline yourself unto godliness.”**

This syllogism confirms the comment of Paul to Timothy, “Great is the mystery of godliness” (I Tim. 3:16). In this case, however, the mystery is not an enigmatic puzzle or the conundrum of contradictory statements, but the awareness that what was once concealed has now been revealed in the Self-revelation of God by the Son. The mystery is Christ (Col. 2:2); “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

The Self-generative function of God whereby He expresses His character out of Himself (*ek theos*) is the sole basis of godliness. Godliness is *only* the result of God’s Self-expression. Godliness is *never* the result of man’s attempt to be like God or to imitate Christ. The Christian life of godliness is not imitation, but manifestation – “the life of Jesus manifested in our mortal bodies” (II Cor. 4:10,11).

Why, then, does the second premise, a direct statement of the imperative command of I Timothy 4:7, admonish the Christian to “discipline yourself unto godliness”? It is important to understand that Biblical imperatives, such as “pursue godliness” (I Tim. 6:11), are always based on the indicatives of God’s provision of grace. Peter explained that “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3). Religion often emphasizes the imperatives without explaining the indicatives of God’s gracious power, and thereby ends up with an empty shell, “a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (II Tim. 3:5). The self-effort performance “works” of religion will never generate godly character.

Only by “the strength which God supplies” (I Pet. 4:11) in the ontological dynamic of His grace, His own Being in action, does the Christian have the “working of His power” (Eph. 3:7), sufficient (II Cor. 12:9) to “reign in life through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17,21). We are “not adequate in ourselves, to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is of God” (II Cor. 3:5). “The surpassing greatness of the power is of God, not of ourselves” (II Cor. 4:7). “God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13), working those “good works which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10), “working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:21). By the saving life of Christ (Rom. 5:10) wherein “Christ lives in us” (Gal. 2:20), we “walk by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16,25), allowing for the expression of “the fruit of the Spirit (which) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and godly control of the self” (Gal. 5:22,23), the character of godliness.

God is the source of all godliness. Only the living Lord Jesus can live the Christian life. The godly life that He lived during His redemptive mission on earth is the life that He wants to live *in* us, *as* us, and *through* us today. Only by the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26), listening under God’s voice to be receptive to His activity, do we allow God to function in the expression of His character of godliness. “Whatever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23), and the failure to allow for the expression of godliness is to inevitably allow for the sinfulness that is derived from Satan’s source (I John 3:8). This need not be the case in the Christian, for “greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4).

## **Conclusion:**

We have submitted some succinct syllogistic statements of the basic realities of the Christian gospel, recognizing that natural logic cannot accommodate the contradictions of such syllogisms. Our objective has not been to engage in mind-games, nor to suggest that cogent cogitation might arrive at cognitive conclusions to resolve the contradictions of these syllogisms.

It is important that Christians understand that the syllogisms of spiritual realities will never make sense to the “natural man” (I Cor. 2:14). We cannot “logic” anyone into believing in God, or acceptance of Jesus Christ as the God-man. The Theo-logic of divine revelation cannot be instructed by means of human logic. Revelation is caught, not taught – received by the spirit, not didactically transferred to the mind.

We began this study with reference to Soren Kierkegaard. The Danish philosopher may not have approved of such a study as this. He would certainly have disagreed with any suggestion that the irrational could be made rational. But in his own way, he too allowed what we have termed the “Theo-logic” of divine revelation to give meaning to his life. He would likely have concurred with our attempt to go beyond Protestant over-objectification in order to consider the internal subjective realities of Christian life and behavior. His emphasis on the subjective impact of the Christ-events teaches us: Christianity is not syllogisms to be examined, but the saving life of Christ to be experienced. Christianity is not propositions to be believed, but a Person to be received. Empirical logic must give way to the experiential life of the risen Lord Jesus.

How does God, by His grace, introduce His Theo-logic to a person’s mind and heart? Often, when a person is sufficiently unsettled and disturbed, either by the intellectual contradictions or by the experiential crises of life, they are willing to seek someOne beyond themselves. When a person is desperate, God introduces Himself and extends the spiritual life of His Son. All men should be allowed to be so unsettled by the logical limitations or the problems of life that they reach out to Jesus Christ in the dependency of faith, the lowliness of humility, and the constancy of worship.

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