

THE FOLSOM
VIEW

“...HAVING THE EYES OF YOUR HEART ENLIGHTENED...” EPHESIANS 1:18

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The Limits of Logic & Training

BY DAVID POSEY

I just finished editing an article and it was a fine one, written by a thoughtful Christian brother. But it took me longer than it should have to edit the article.

Why? Because — and I’m making an educated guess about the cause here — the man *thinks*, logically, that something is true that is not, and he has been *trained* to do something that is no longer necessary.

Limits of Logic

He thinks this he should put the quotation marks at the end of a quote inside the punctuation, like this: “...on high”. That makes sense, because there are other thoughts expressed in the sentence. So, logically, the period, which is designed to indicate the end of the entire sentence, should go outside the quotation marks that are part of the sentence. It makes sense; it’s logical. But it’s *wrong!* The rules of punctuation demand that the period goes inside the quotation marks every time (unless, by the way, you live in Great Britain).

I’m not a grammar elitist; I make my share of mistakes. But if you are writing a formal essay or resume or an article for publication, this error will expose some ignorance. *Ignorance*, not intelligence. But it can harm your credibility.

This is an article about writing, however. It’s about the limits of our logic. A classical example of this is found in the case of Naaman the leper. His famous words, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper” still ring in my ears from hearing it in sermon after sermon.

Naaman thought, logically, that a prophet had the power to take his leprosy away with a word or a wave of the hand. But Elisha told him he had to go dip seven times in the notoriously muddy Jordan River instead. An act, by the way, that has motivated

more than one “seven ducks in a muddy stream” sermons.

I believe that as we grow in the faith and become more familiar with the Bible, we’ll see the logic behind most of the commands and principles in Scripture. But logic has its limitations. And we must place our faith in God, not in our own logic. Paul turns logic on its head in Romans 9. In answer

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to the question, “why have you made me like this?” Paul says, “who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘why have you made me like this?’”

You may not get it, logically. Doesn’t matter. If God said it, it’s so. “Let God be true though everyone were a liar” (Rom. 3:4). “Logic” is defined as *a particular method of reasoning or argumentation*. Informally, we think of it as that which “makes sense.” The rule about quotation marks doesn’t make a lot of sense and we can argue about the motivation or “good sense” of those who made the rule in the first place. But that won’t help you when you’re trying to get a job and the person reading the resume knows the rule. Your credibility will take a hit.

So, as the Nike ad says, “Just Do It.”

Limits of Training

The second error I had to correct in the article is a common one committed by older writers. The error dates back to the days when people used typewriters for written communication. But the way, a “typewriter” was a clunky piece of equipment in

which raised letters, placed at the end of a metal rod, struck paper through an inked ribbon, thereby placing an impression of a letter on the page.

The type was called “monospaced” type, because there was the same amount of space between each letter, regardless of the width of the letter (i.e., the



A “Typewriter.” If you ever used one of these, it proves just one thing: you’re old!

space between a lower “l” and an “m” was the same). When the periods were placed at the end of the sentence, then, it created a “scrunched up” look. Typists were taught to hit the space bar twice at the end of sentences to create a little more space. That convention is unnecessary in keyboarding on computers, however.

“Kerning” — the process that controls the space between letters — is done automatically by the computer. When we encounter a piece written on a computer that uses the old typewriter convention, that extra space has to be removed or you will get a document that looks like there are rivers running through it.

The point is, we sometimes have to reject or revise our training to please the editors or others we are trying to impress.

The same is true in our spiritual life. Peter is a perfect example of this. Peter’s rooftop experience (Acts 10:9) challenged everything he had been taught from his youth up. The words, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat” (v. 13) were jarring. So much so, that even to the Lord he said, “No way!!”

But his training was no longer useful. God had changed the rules and now what the Law had called “unclean” or “common” was no longer unclean. Even after the vision and the word from God, Peter was perplexed. Eventually, he figured it out — this was not about food, although there was a lesson there. It was about people: “I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

The importance of training our children cannot be overstated. We know that just about everything we do and say will have some effect on our children, for better or worse. Many of us are still captive to our upbringing, in a negative way.

But one lesson we learn here is that God clearly expects us to rise above our upbringing and early training and move on to another level. Our training, in certain areas of life, like hitting the space bar twice, may have been appropriate for the time or for our age. But we have to move beyond that and learn the principles behind the training.

The man who still hits the space bar twice is doing it either by habit, without thinking, or still thinks it’s “right,” but doesn’t know why. There are children who have grown up who would never miss an assembly of the local church, but don’t know really know why they attend.

In fact, I dare say, the greatest danger to those of us who grew up on the pew is the danger of walking lockstep to rules we learned as children, without giving much thought to what we learned.

In our opening illustrations, taken from the world of writing and editing, there are two rules: one of them is still true, and it doesn’t seem logical. It illustrates the principle that we must obey, even if we don’t fully understand the principle or logic behind the rule. We can question all of the grammar experts until we’re blue in the proverbial face, but that will never change the rule or restore the credibility we may lose by violating the rule.

The other rule was a good one for its time. Placing two spaces between sentences made the document look better than those which were typed without this convention. But many learned the rule without learning the principle behind it and habitually practice the same old rule. That creates more work for the editor, it dates the writer and it may affect the perception of the one who wrote by the one reading the document. It illustrates the importance of teaching principles as soon as our children are able to grasp them.