

**Paul's Logic in 2Corinthians 5:17**  
**by Bob DeWaay**

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2Corinthians 5:17)*

**Sentential Logic; Hypothetical Syllogism**

**Modus Ponens: *Affirming the Antecedent***

If A, then B  
A  
Therefore B

Example:

If Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as He predicted; then His claims are true.

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as He predicted.

Therefore His claims are true. (A valid, logically necessary conclusion)

**Modus Tollens: *Denying the Consequent***

If A, then B  
Not B

Therefore not A

If a creature is a dog, then it will have four legs.

The farmer's pet named Quakie does not have four legs.

Therefore Quakie is not a dog.

Both affirming the antecedent and denying the consequent are logically valid. That means that if the original if . . . then statement is true; then the conclusions necessarily follow. (I just used such logic)

**Fallacy: Denying the Antecedent**

If a creature is a dog, then it will have four legs.

Fluffy is not a dog.

Therefore Fluffy does not have four legs.

This is a logical fallacy because there may be more than one cause for the same effect. Fluffy the cat has four legs as well.

## **Fallacy: Affirming the Consequent**

If a creature is a dog, then it will have four legs.

Fluffy has four legs.

Therefore Fluffy is a dog.

The reason this is a logical fallacy is the same one that makes denying the antecedent a fallacy; there may be more than one cause for there being a creature with four legs.

### **Applying This Logical Form to Paul's Argument**

#### **Modus Ponens**

If a person is in Christ; then He is a new creature.

Bill is in Christ

Therefore Bill is a new creature.

That is a valid implication.

#### **Modus Tollens**

If a person is in Christ; then He is a new creature.

Bill is not a new creature

Therefore Bill is not in Christ

That is a valid implication.

### **But there are possible fallacies!**

#### *Fallacy: Denying the antecedent*

If a person is in Christ; then He is a new creature.

Bill is not in Christ

Therefore Bill is not a new creature

This is a fallacy because there may be other causes for being a new creature

It may be a true statement; but we do not know it to be true based only on what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

### *Fallacy: Affirming the Consequent*

If a person is in Christ; then He is a new creature.

Bill is a new creature.

Therefore Bill is in Christ.

This fallacy actually happens regularly. People often make claims that they have had radical life changing experiences that made them new people through various religious conversions.

### **So what have we learned?**

*Here are the valid implications of 2Corinthians 5:17:*

Being in Christ does indeed mean we are new creatures.

If we are not new creatures, we are not in Christ!

Therefore, those who claim to be in Christ whose lives have not changed at all, have false assurance.

But beware, not every positive, life changing experience is proof of being in Christ.

### **Addendum**

There is a way of making a statement in which the antecedent or consequent can be either affirmed or denied and lead to valid conclusions. This would be the case had Paul said this:

*If and only if a person is in Christ is he then a new creature.* (I would not rule out the possibility that Paul intended to imply this; but it is not explicitly stated)

This is called a “bi-conditional” proposition.

If such a statement is true, then if one is not in Christ, he is not a new creature and if he is a new creature, he is in Christ. Denying the antecedent and affirming the consequent are no longer fallacies.

But such a statement is only true if it describes necessary, or definitional conditions that are unique to the object being described: “An element is helium if and only if it has the atomic number of 2.”

Here is one that is true:

A being is God if and only if that being is eternal and non-contingent.

See Normal L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks *Come Let Us Reason -- An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) for a good introduction to logic.