



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 7 – HERMENEUTICS: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
LESSON 138 – LOGICAL FALLACIES

EXEGETICAL FALLACIES (SECOND EDITION) – DA CARSON

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Sounds Logical To Me

- ▶ Logical Fallacies:
- ▶ Why are fire engines red?
- ▶ There are 12 inches in a ruler
- ▶ Queen Elizabeth is a ruler
- ▶ The Queen Elizabeth is a ship
- ▶ Ships sail on the sea
- ▶ There are fish in the sea
- ▶ Fish have fins
- ▶ The Fins fought the Russians
- ▶ Russians are red
- ▶ Since fire engines are always rushin', fire engines are red.

Four Senses Logic is Used

- ▶ Logic at the theoretical level is an analysis and evaluation of the ways of using evidence to derive a correct conclusion.
- ▶ Logic in common speech at a nontechnical level is a synonym for words such as “workable, reasonable, etc.”
- ▶ Logic sometimes means a formal presentation of an argument; that is, people engage in “logical argument” whether or not there are fallacies in the steps they take.
- ▶ Logic in common speech may refer to a set of propositions or even an outlook which may or may not be “logical” in the first sense. Hence the logic you use may differ from the logic I use to reach conclusions.
- ▶ We are looking at logic in the first sense.

Logic is Universal

- ▶ Logic is the set of relationships (nicely formulated by Aristotle and others) that must apply if any knowledge is possible and if any communication of propositional knowledge is possible.
- ▶ The necessary substratum of all coherent knowledge and of all rational communication is simple logic in this first sense.
- ▶ The fundamental laws of logic, such as the law of noncontradiction (contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time), the law of the excluded middle (either a proposition or its negation are true), and the law of identity (each thing is identical with itself) are universally true.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 1. False Disjunctions – an improper appeal to the law of the excluded middle.
- ▶ This is a false either/or requirement when complementarity might be acceptable.
- ▶ For example, one commentary on Matthew notes that the accounts of miracles in Matthew are shorter than they are in Mark, but Matthew includes theological reflections on the miracles. The conclusion then is to say that “The miracles are not important for their own sakes, but by reason of the messages they convey.” This takes an either/or stance instead of seeing that both can be true at the same time – the miracle matters as much as the message it means to convey.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 2. Failure to Recognize Distinctions – this concludes that because x and y are alike in certain respects they are alike in all respects.
- ▶ For example, one commentator has written that since there is no male or female in Christ, then the injunction for women to keep silent in the church cannot be taken at face value. He assumes here that in Christ, male and female are exactly alike.
- ▶ While in their standing before God, male and female are as one, this cannot mean that they are exactly alike, because they are created with distinctions and given differing roles within the Body of Christ and even within marriage.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 3. Appeal to Selective Evidence – this refers to the use of evidence to support a view while ignoring or overlooking (intentionally or not) evidence to the contrary.
- ▶ Taking the example of women being silent in the church, we must understand that this is in the context of the role of pastors and preaching to the assembled congregation. Some say that women must not speak, pray, give testimonies, or even sing when the church is gathered. This ignores Paul mention just 3 chapters earlier mentioning women praying and prophesying.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 4. Improperly Handled Syllogisms – whereby an argument sounds good at first but upon closer examination cannot stand up to scrutiny.
- ▶ For example, 2 of the first 7 deacons spoke in public and baptized individuals. That by itself cannot be used then to say that all deacons must speak in public and baptize converts.
- ▶ Simplified:

All dogs are animals.

A cat is an animal.

Therefore, a cat is a dog.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 5. Negative Inferences – a negative inference may be true, but this cannot be assumed, and in any case, is never true *because* of the negative inference.
- ▶ Example – All Orthodox Jews believe in Moses.
Mr. Smith is not an Orthodox Jew.
Therefore, Mr. Smith does not believe in Moses.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 6. World-view Confusion – the fallacy in this case is in thinking that one's own experiences and interpretation of reality are the proper framework for interpreting Biblical texts, whereas in fact there may be such deep differences once we probe beyond the superficial level that we find quite different categories are being used.
- ▶ Example – in eastern thought, the verse “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” is often taken to mean “Blessed are those who purify their consciences, for they shall see themselves as God.” The worldview presents an unjustifiable interpretation.
- ▶ Example – in western thought, we see often that the command to “take up your cross” is to bear with uncomfortable or undesirable circumstances or even people. To the first century reader, anyone taking up a cross was going to die.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 7. Fallacies of Question-Framing – like asking, “When did you stop beating your wife?” This imposes one’s understanding of the circumstances, which may not be correct.
- ▶ 8. Unwarranted Confusion of Truth and Precision – a set of statements may be true but not equally precise. Example: 1) My home is not far from my office. 2) My home is about one and a half miles from my office. 3) My home is 1.6 miles from my office. True, but not equally precise.
- ▶ 9. Purely Emotive Appeals – Responding by writing, “Astonishingly, Mr. Smith fails to take into account the fact that....” This adds a negative, emotional facet to the argument that appeals to emotion to discredit instead of appealing to facts.

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 10. Unwarranted Generalization and Overspecification – This makes a general statement into a particular statement. The general application applies some of the time while the particular applies every time.
- ▶ 11. Unwarranted Associative Jumps – this occurs when a word or phrase triggers off an associated idea, concept, or experience that bears no close relation to the text at hand. Example: “I can do all things through Christ....”- this cannot mean all things without distinction.
- ▶ 12. False Statements – using faulty data, or an author’s mistake relying on unreliable sources.
- ▶ 13. The Non-Sequitur – the conclusion “does not follow.” Example: “The man without love knows nothing of God, so the only way to truly know God is through a loving relationship.”

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 14. Cavalier Dismissal – writing off an argument does not mean it has been handled or answered.
- ▶ 15. Fallacies Based on Equivocal Arguments – An argument may not be wrong even though it is faulty.
- ▶ 16. Inadequate Analogies – this occurs when we suppose that a particular analogy sheds light on a Biblical text or theme when in fact it is inadequate or inappropriate.
- ▶ 17. Abuse of “obviously” – Just because a writer says it is obvious doesn’t mean it is obvious!

Logical Fallacies

- ▶ 18. Simplistic Appeals to Authority – an appeal to authority does not constitute a reason for interpreting a text a certain way.
- ▶ All of us will fall afoul of one or more of these fallacies at some time or another; but alert awareness of their prevalence and nature may help us escape their clutches more frequently than would otherwise be the case.
- ▶ We must be careful....and logical in our handling of the Scriptures.
- ▶ Next Week: Lesson 139 – Historical Fallacies