

Bible Interpretation and Logical Fallacies

Across Disciplines Bible readers and teachers should practice good interpretation skills to seek truth. It is also beneficial to understand how society sometimes disregards fact-finding and truth. Our post-modern culture often prioritizes personal feelings over objective reality, but this can't last as objective reality is inherent in the world created by God. Each meeting of this program will include a brief lesson on logical fallacies to enhance interpretation skills.

Common Bible Interpretation Errors

Ignore Immediate Context: Misinterpreting verses by neglecting their surrounding context.

Figurative Fallacy / Genre Ignorance: Misunderstanding the genre or figurative language used.

Saying But Not Citing or **Selective Citing:** Quoting scriptures selectively to support personal views.

Inadequate Evidence or **Drawing conclusions** without sufficient biblical evidence.

Confused Definition Misrepresenting a core theology (e.g., presenting a twisted version of predestination to make a point about the superiority of free will).

Ignore Alternate Explanations Dismissing other plausible interpretations.

Obvious Fallacy Making a flawed argument that's easily disproven.

Virtue by Association Appealing to authority or a favorite teacher instead of the evidence.

Esoteric Interpretation Looking for a hidden meaning rather than authorial intent.

Supplementing Biblical Authority Rejecting or adding to biblical authority.

World View Confusion: Presentism - Introducing present-day ideas, values, or perspectives into interpretations of the past. (Anachronism)

Logical Fallacies

Ad Hominem: Attacking a person's character instead of addressing their argument.

Example:

Person A: "We need to improve public education funding because our schools are under-resourced."

Person B: "Why should we listen to you? You failed out of college."

Straw Man Argument: Misrepresenting or oversimplifying another person's argument to make it easier to attack.

Example:

Person A: "I believe religion provides moral guidance and helps build community."

Person B: "So you're saying atheists can't be moral and have no sense of community?"

Appeal to Ignorance: Assuming something is true because it hasn't been proven false, or vice versa.

Example:

"You can't prove God doesn't exist therefore God exists."

"You can't prove God exists therefore God doesn't exist."

False Dilemma: Presenting two options as the only possibilities when others exist.

Example:

"You find your meaning from God who is non-material, thus you must reject or devalue the study of material sciences."

Slippery Slope: Arguing that one small step will inevitably lead to a chain of related (negative) events.

Sunk Costs: Continuing a course of action based on past investments rather than current evidence.

Example:

"We purchased land for a new church and spent lots of money laying the foundation. I know we are down to 55 people because of the recent scandal, but we've already raised the funds so we must finish the project."

Circular Reasoning: When the conclusion of an argument is assumed in the premise.

Example:

"Smoking pot is against the law because it's wrong; I know it's wrong because it is against the law."

Hasty Generalization: Making a broad claim based on limited evidence.

Red Herring: Introducing an irrelevant topic to divert attention from the original issue.

Example:

Person A: "Let's discuss the problem of evil—how can a benevolent, all-powerful God allow so much suffering?"

Person B: "Well, atheists have caused suffering too—look at what Stalin did."

Appeal to Hypocrisy: Responding to criticism by pointing out the opponent's inconsistency rather than addressing the argument itself.

Example:

Person A: "Religious leaders promote peace and compassion."

Person B: "Well, what about all the wars started by religious people? Your faith clearly isn't peaceful either."

Causal Fallacy: Assuming correlation implies causation.

Example:

"Countries that are more religious are poorer, so religion must cause poverty."

"I prayed for it to rain, and it rained the next day—so clearly, my prayer caused the rain."

(Doctor says) "Well the last ten people who came in with a cough were covid cases, this person is coughing, so it must be covid, we don't even have to test them."

Appeal to Authority: Believing a claim is true because an authority figure endorses it.

Appeal to Pity: Using pity to sway opponents instead of logical argument.

Example: A famous musical superstar cries on social media to sway people to be against all deportations of illegal immigrants.

Bandwagon Fallacy: Arguing something is true because it's popular.

Defense Mechanisms

- **Denial:** Refusing to accept reality.
- **Acting Out:** Performing extreme behaviors instead of handling emotions.
- **Rationalization:** Creating logical excuses for illogical behavior.