

# Theological Equipping Class

## Logical Fallacies

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The necessity of thinking

- *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...* (Rom 12:2)
- *Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.* (2 Timothy 2:7)
- *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* (Philippians 4:8)
- *he gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds & teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith & of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to & fro by waves & carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...* (Eph 4:11-16)
- *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.* (1 Cor 14:20)

### What is a fallacy?

- It's an error in reasoning that renders an argument untrue, invalid or unsound.
- Get the concepts even if you don't remember the names

### Equivocation

- What is it? It is when "the same term is used in two or more different senses in the course of an argument" (Peter Kreeft)
- Examples:
  - Who's on First?
  - Tofu is better than bacon.
    - Premise 1: Tofu is better than nothing.
    - Premise 2: Nothing is better than bacon.
    - So, tofu is better than nothing.
    - If  $A > B$  &  $B > C$  then  $A > C$ . So what's the problem? Equivocation.
- Examples in church culture.
  - Don't judge me!
  - Should I attend a gay wedding?
  - What is love?
  - Discipline vs. abuse
- Apologetics and worldview conversations:
  - Islam: do we both pray to God?
  - Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses: we both believe in Jesus?
  - Christians committing adultery and divorce
- So to avoid this fallacy you need to ask: are we using the same word with slightly different meanings?

## **Appeal to emotion** (*ad misericordiam* – notice the root word misery in there)

- Commercials: Buy this gum so you can be happy. Support our non-profit so these puppies won't be sad.
- Appealing to emotions isn't inherently wrong, but what makes this fallacious is where the appeal to emotion is used as a substitute rather than a supplement for the argument & the emotional force is used to circumvent or distort thinking.
- Let me give you two examples and see if you can guess if either, neither, or both are fallacious.
  - Example 1: someone shows a picture of a child who has been abused as an argument for why we shouldn't spank our kids.
  - Example 2: someone shows a picture of an aborted baby as evidence for why abortion is morally wrong.
    - Is either fallacious? Both? Neither.
- Some more examples:
  - Starving children in Africa
  - Mass shootings
  - Phrases like, "you don't know what I've been through," or "think about how hard that will be for that person," often errantly appeal to the emotions.
- Where this comes up in the Church:
  - Divorce
  - "Good people going to hell"
  - The horror of a universal flood or the conquest of Canaan
  - Predestination
  - Sexuality
  - Victimhood

## **Begging the question** (*petitio principii*)

- Begs the question is a technical term for this fallacy where someone assumes what they are trying to prove. So it's a form of circular reasoning.
- A few examples:
  - Lawyer: my client is not guilty because he didn't commit the crime.
  - I believe in UFOs because otherwise the aliens couldn't have gotten here.
  - Have you stopped beating your wife?
  - "A woman has the right to do what she wants with her own body."
- We see this in theology
  - Paedobaptists: "Baptists exclude from the covenant those whom Christ has welcomed."
  - The Bible can't be true because it contains miracles.
  - Miracles don't happen because I've never seen one.
  - Jesus couldn't have risen from the dead because dead people don't rise from the dead.
  - "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction..." (Dawkins)
- So, to spot this fallacy, you want to see if any of the propositions are simply stated without being proven. Is the person arguing in a circle? Are you arguing in a circle?
- Is the appeal to Scripture begging the question?

## **Ad hominem: to the person**

- Attack the arguer rather than the argument!
- Not every attack on a person is an ad hominem.
  - Jesus calls Pharisees sons of Satan and whitewashed tombs.
- Let's look at a couple of examples of actual ad hominem:
  - Luther was anti-semitic
  - John Calvin approved of the execution of Michael Servetus for heresy
  - Our American forefathers owned slaves
- Church examples:
  - You are proud or arrogant.
  - Christianity can't be true because of the crusades. What about all the atrocities that Christians have committed?
  - Or Christianity can't be true because the Bible doesn't condemn slavery and Christians owned slaves.
- When it comes to an argument, always to consider the argument, not the arguer.
  - As RC Sproul once said, "I can learn something from everyone, even the devil, if nothing else then how to be crafty."

## **Strawman**

- This fallacy is when your opponent frames your argument in a way that is easy to knock over.
  - In other words, you refute "an unfairly weak, stupid or ridiculous version of your opponent's idea (either his conclusion or his argument) instead of the more reasonable idea he actually holds." (Peter Kreeft)
- Let me give you some examples from culture
  - Political ads
  - Defund Planned Parenthood
  - Pro-lifers want women to have abortions in back alleys
  - Gun control.
- What about in evangelism?
  - "Christianity is misogynistic! It teaches that women are second class citizens undeserving of human rights!"
  - "Christians deny evolution and therefore reject all science."
- "One of the rules of medieval debate was designed to block 'straw man' arguments: you must first state your opponent's idea in your own words (to be sure you understand the idea instead of just parroting the words), to his satisfaction, before you go on to refute it." (Peter Kreeft)

## **Appeal to experience**

- When you reject an argument simply because of some experience.
  - You can't speak truth to me because you are of a different race than me and don't know what I've been through.
  - Speaking truth in the wrong way makes it untrue.
  - "I don't have to listen to what you say because I don't like the way you are saying it."
  - You just don't get it because you're a millennial. You just can't understand because you're a boomer.
  - Men don't have a right to comment on abortion because it is a 'woman's body issue.'
  - Christians shouldn't drink alcohol because my dad was an abusive alcoholic or my friend was killed by a drunk driver.
- We see this all the time in discussions of Christianity.
  - Atheism or agnosticism

## **Moving the goalposts**

- Flat earthers
- Bible contradictions?
- So here's a good question to ask: what evidence could I give you that would cause you to rethink your position or admit that you're wrong?

## **False dilemma (excluding the middle or false dichotomy)**

- Donate to my campaign if you love America.
- Either adopt every kid or allow abortions.
- Advertising
- Your kids do this: buy me this book. No. You don't want me to read?
- Church examples:
  - Either believe in 7 literal 24 hours or deny Christianity.
  - Either believe that women can be elders in a church or support the systematic abuse of women
  - Either forbid spanking as a parent or advocate for child abuse
  - Either just accept constant marital abuse or get a divorce.
  - In each of those instances, there are other options. They are false dichotomies.
  - As is:
    - Jesus is either man or God.
    - God is either 3 or 1.
    - God is either fully sovereign or man is fully responsible. Can't have both.
- Christians are accused of doing this in evangelism: if you're not going to heaven, you must be going to hell.
  - Is that a "false" dichotomy?
- Whenever you are given only a few options, ask, "are there any other possibilities here?"

## **Red Herring**

- A red herring is a remark inserted into a discussion, either intentionally or unintentionally, that sidetracks the discussion.
- We see this when debating political and social issues:
  - Abortion --- capital punishment
  - Illegal immigration --- legal immigrants
- Examples from evangelical culture:
  - Women preaching
  - Is God necessary for morality?
- Here's the defense to the red herring. Don't take the bait. Instead, just say maybe that's true, but its irrelevant to this particular topic.