



Exegetical Fallacies

D.A. Carson

Download now

Read Online ➔

Exegetical Fallacies

D.A. Carson

Exegetical Fallacies D.A. Carson

Updated explanations of the "sins" of interpretation teach sound grammatical, lexical, cultural, theological, and historical Bible study practices.

Exegetical Fallacies Details

Date : Published March 1st 1996 by Baker Academic (first published November 30th 1983)

ISBN : 9780801020865

Author : D.A. Carson

Format : Paperback 148 pages

Genre : Religion, Theology, Christian, Nonfiction

 [Download Exegetical Fallacies ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Exegetical Fallacies ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Exegetical Fallacies D.A. Carson

From Reader Review Exegetical Fallacies for online ebook

Benjamin Thompson says

This is an excellent, yet brief overview of the many different mistakes Christians and non-Christians make when interpreting the Bible. The chapter on Word Studies I found particularly helpful. D.A. Carson lays out well-thought out examples of each fallacy and notes the importance of being self-critical in investigating the Biblical text.

Andrew Bondurant says

Really helpful brief treatment of common fallacies. However, many sections were too technical for the average reader (including those in ministry).

I do highly recommend the book for seminarians, ministers, and lay people as the awareness of these fallacies is very helpful. Be willing to press through and gloss over the areas you feel you have no category for and you will benefit from pulling the gold out of other areas.

Jimmy says

This is a good book for those who engage in exegesis of the Bible. Actually, I would go far to say that it book is essential for every exegete to have it on their bookshelf. While the work is not intended to instruct on Biblical languages per se, nevertheless the focus of the book on mistakes and fallacies is helpful as a lesson for interpreters of the Bible to be careful of avoiding common pitfalls in their exegesis. I particularly was challenged to think more carefully when it comes to the book's discussion of word study fallacies; I admit I have committed some of the examples the author gave! As a result this book has prompted me to think more carefully of my interpretation of the Bible. The book assumes the readers will know Greek especially in his chapter on grammatical fallacies. This chapter was a good reminder of Greek grammar and common exegetical mistake at the level of tenses, voice, etc. It was this chapter that got me thinking if the book should be better titled "New Testament Exegetical Fallacies" since the author D.A. Carson is a professor of the New Testament and does not give any Old Testament examples. Having said that, I still it is beneficial for those specializing in the Old Testament. My favorite chapters were on logical fallacies and historical and presuppositional fallacies. As I was reading the chapter on logical fallacies, I started to realize that it wouldn't be such a bad idea for seminaries, Bible institutes and advance Sunday schools to have logic being formally taught for the sake of hermeneutics (and if I may add, apologetics!). The only part I thought D.A. Carson was mistaken was his use of the term "valid" on page 119 when he said "even when an argument is valid, it may not be conclusive. Some arguments are intrinsically weak." Here the problem lies in his use of the term "valid," since he is using this in a popular sense rather than the more technical sense in logic of a deductive argument in which the conclusion necessarily follow from the premises. In the precise technical sense of the meaning of "valid," Carson's first sentence would be contradictory since an argument can not be necessarily conclusive and not conclusive at the same time in the same sense. The category of "weak" (mentioned in the second sentence that I quoted) is the characteristic of inductive argument and thus Carson would be making a categorical fallacy to talk about arguments without distinguishing them from "valid" and "invalid" arguments which are deductive by nature. Again, this is a good work and made me want to read more of what Carson has to say.

Adam Calvert says

This is a great book by D.A. Carson focusing on a topic not too often discussed. The book is laid out in five self-explanatory chapters:

1. Word-Study Fallacies
2. Grammatical Fallacies
3. Logical Fallacies
4. Presuppositional and Historical Fallacies
5. Concluding Reflections

Chapters one and two really focus on word-study and grammar fallacies as they pertain to the New Testament Greek. So someone with little familiarity with that language might not profit as much from these chapters (although I think they still might profit if nothing else in being able to detect those fallacies when they're produced by others).

Chapters three, four, and five I think could be useful to anyone and should probably be read by everyone who has any kind of exegetical teaching ministry in his or her church.

The whole book was fascinating and sobering. It warns us of the fallacies we are so easily prone to commit (especially when we are trying to safe-guard a pet doctrine), and it serves to help us better detect such fallacies in others.

The real excitement though (and I think a must-read for anyone really) is the Introduction. It is here where the sobering remarks most prominently affect the reader's heart and make him examine himself (or herself) more carefully when doing the task of exegesis or just the task of trying to understand God's Word, period.

Justin Tapp says

I didn't learn to read my Bible until late in life, and I'm convinced most Christians in "Bible-believing" churches do not because they are not taught how to. Everyone tends to believe that their "doctrine" is correct, or the true doctrine. Where another's disagrees, he must be wrong. When we adhere to "doctrine," it gets replicated and multiplied and no one thinks critically about what we believe and adhere to. This was made depressingly clear to me in a recent book I read about a former pastor who became an atheist in part because he realized no one around him, himself included, actually knew what the Bible was.

As Carson writes (p. 11):

"It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of certainty. Because traditions are reshaped as they are passed on, after a while we may drift far from God's Word while still insisting all our theological opinions are 'biblical' and therefore true."

Southern Baptist churches in particular err in teaching the Bible through Sunday school lessons that break up the text and tell the reader what it means rather than have the reader ask questions of the text himself. I've

lost count of seminary students I know who were amazed that when they learned how to study the text, they suddenly realized they'd misunderstood or wrongly believed a meaning of a particular text all these years. Alas, very few of them teach their congregation other than demonstrating proper exegesis from the pulpit. But Exegetical Fallacies has to be a humbling read for even the most well-trained, because so many of the scholars Carson is critiquing are career professionals in biblical study. He notes fallacies that his own seminary professors made.

This is not the first book I would recommend to one who wants to learn how to read the Bible (See Fee and Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, for starters). Carson's work is a seminary-level text for which some knowledge of Greek is expected and biblical interpretation is already a habit. I have neither formal training nor do I know Greek. The value of this book to me is inoculation against the common forms of poor exegesis or logical fallacies that those writing various books and commentaries make frequently. I can now read more skeptically various commentaries and Sunday school lessons that I look to for insight. I can also hold the Word of God more delicately, humbled at how hard it is to truly understand meaning through the distance of time, language, and culture. But I can also be more confident as Carson critiques the logical fallacies that post-modern "new" interpreters make in saying the meaning of a text cannot be known because of the personal lens I look through to see it.

"The sensitive student may ask, 'If there are so many exegetical traps, so many hermeneutical pitfalls, how can I ever be confident that I am rightly interpreting and preaching the Scriptures? How can I avoid the dreadful burden of teaching untruth, of laying on the consciences of Christ's people things Christ does not himself impose, or removing what he insists should be borne? How much damage might I do by my ignorance and exegetical clumsiness?'

To such students, I can only say that you will make more mistakes if you fail to embark on such a study as this than you will if you face the tough questions and improve your skills" (p. 14).

The book is a hodgepodge, with some topics given lengthy treatment and others only mentioned or glossed over. Some of the gems are where Carson outlines his own arguments against someone else's exegesis, making his argument. It is filled with dry wit. You might open it to the Index first, and be amazed at the wide range of biblical passages, authors, and topics addressed in such a short book. I gleaned bits about specific topics, texts, and just a greater overall appreciation for Biblical translation than I had prior to reading it.

Some of my highlights. First, Carson's motivation (p. 11):

The fact remains that among those who believe the canonical sixty-six books are nothing less than the Word of God written there is a disturbing array of mutually incompatible theological opinions. Robert K. Johnston has a point when he writes:

'[That] evangelicals, all claiming a Biblical norm, are reaching contradictory theological formulations on many of the major issues they are addressing suggests the problematic nature of their present understanding of theological interpretation. To argue that the Bible is authoritative, but to be unable to come to anything like agreement on what it says (even with those who share an evangelical commitment), is self-defeating.'

The world is skeptical about the Bible because they see mutually exclusive claims to truth on basic tenets of those who supposedly see it as the inerrant word of God.

The difference between exegesis and hermeneutics (p. 15):

(E)xegesis is concerned with actually interpreting the text, whereas hermeneutics is concerned with the nature of the interpretative process. Exegesis concludes by saying, 'This passage means such and such'; hermeneutics ends by saying, 'This interpretative process is constituted by the following techniques and preunderstandings.' Hermeneutics is an important discipline in its own right, ideally it is never an end in

itself: it serves exegesis."

The challenge of distanciation (p. 15):

"Whenever we try to understand the thought of a text (or of another person, for that matter), if we are to understand it critically-that is, not in some arbitrary fashion, but with sound reasons, and as the author meant it in the first place-we must first of all grasp the nature and degree of the differences that separate our understanding from the understanding of the text

Failure to go through the distanciation before the fusion usually means there has been no real fusion: the interpreter thinks he knows what the text means, but all too often he or she has simply imposed his own thoughts onto the text."

Picked up again on p. 60:

"Unless we recognize the 'distance' that separates us from the text being studied, we will overlook differences of outlook, vocabulary, interest; and quite unwittingly we will read our mental baggage into the text without pausing to ask if that is appropriate.

This does not mean real knowledge is impossible. Rather, it means that real knowledge is close to impossible if we fail to recognize our own assumptions, questions, interests, and biases; but if we recognize them and, in dialogue with the text, seek to make allowances for them, we will be better able to avoid confusing our own world-views with those of the biblical writers."

What, then, of the post-modern "new hermeneutic" who argue it's impossible for any of us to interpret a text due to our "baggage?" (p.72-73, emphasis mine):

"The new hermeneutic breaks down the strong subject/object disjunction characteristic of older hermeneutical theory. The interpreter who approaches a text, it is argued, already brings along a certain amount of cultural, linguistic, and ethical baggage. Even the questions the interpreter tries to ask (or fails to ask) of the text reflect the limitations imposed by that baggage; they will in some measure shape the kind of "responses" that can come back from the text and the interpreter's understanding of them.

But these responses thereby shape the mental baggage the interpreter is carrying, so that in the next round the kinds of questions addressed to the text will be slightly different, and will therefore generate a fresh series of responses-and so on, and so on. Thus, a "hermeneutical circle" is set up.

Such absolute relativism is not only unnecessary, but also self-contradictory; for the authors of such views expect us to understand the meaning of their articles! Whatever the problems raised by the new hermeneutic, we have learned much from these developments. In particular, we have been forced to recognize that distanciation is an important part of coming to grips with any text: the interpreter must "distance" his or her own horizon of understanding from that of the text. When the differences are more clearly perceived, then it becomes possible to approach the text with greater sensitivity than would otherwise be the case."

What is the solution to the apparent paradox? First, have humility about what we actually know or can know. Second is to do the best you can using historical sources (p. 74):

"But if we sometimes read our own theology into the text, the solution is not to retreat to an attempted neutrality, to try to make one's mind a tabula rasa so we may listen to the text without bias. It cannot be done, and it is a fallacy to think it can be. We must rather discern what our prejudices are and make allowances for them; and meanwhile we should learn all the historical theology we can."

I'm not certain which seminary Carson is criticizing here, but I can guess:

"One well-known seminary insists that proper exegetical method will guarantee such a high quality of exegesis that historical theology may be safely ignored."

There are good examples of how Carson deals with difficult passages regarding polity. There is a good section on logical fallacies and a few on common specific errors that people make regarding the Greek. I enjoyed this book, it gave me a greater appreciation of biblical scholarship. I do not know if he dealt with all topics properly or if he should have paid more attention to certain issues. I learned a lot and the more I learn the more I will return to this book. 4.5 stars out of 5.

Andrew Pendleton says

This book is full of illuminating examples that illustrate the different fallacies he lists and it should help any Christian approach interpreting the Bible with more care and humility.

Chase Tremaine says

For what this book sets out to be, it's fantastic. As a quick overview of the most common word-grammar fallacies, logical fallacies, historical fallacies, etc., D.A. Carson does a lovely job of presenting solid explanations and brief examples that are often helpful and rarely confusing. A few times during my read, I had to look up the meaning of a word or re-read a paragraph that went entirely over my head; for the most part, though, Exegetical Fallacies was an easy and light read, surprisingly fast-paced and enjoyable. The book isn't very long, so I read it across 3-4 sittings, and whilst going through the book with a friend, it also made for great conversation. In years to come, this book will be an easy tool for me to refer back to whenever I want to double check that I'm not making the sorts of logical errors in text interpretation that this short volume expertly helps people of all folds to sidestep.

J Michael says

If you are doing independent Bible study you want to read this book. While a scholarly topic it is relatively easy to read. Further it will help you to identify and possibly avoid making some mistakes in your understanding and application of the Word of God.

I especially like that Carson used his own errors as examples. Great and useful book.

William Dicks says

Carson is here at his exegetical best. I believe every Christian should read this book. Carson handles word-study, grammatical, logical, presuppositional and historical fallacies.

Under the word-study fallacy he handles one of the great fallacies we have heard in the church for the past 30 years: the so-called differences between *agape* and *phileo*, and many more.

In his chapter on grammatical fallacies, Carson deals extensively with issues of Greek translation, where preachers and teachers would make comments based on the Greek. He explains how Greek is a very flexible language and that assumptions based on a little Greek knowledge could actually be very incorrect!

Next, Carson deals with logical fallacies. This is where many Christians get tripped up. There are many areas in which Christians make false assumptions when dealing with logic, especially while reading the Bible. In this chapter we learn how to read the Bible with our minds active and in thinking mode. Truth is propositional, and we need to know how to handle those propositions correctly.

In His chapter on presuppositional and historical fallacies, Carson explains how our own frame of reference can influence how we read the Bible, and how to read the Bible correctly, understanding what it means from the author's perspective. He also shows how our interpretation of history can be muddled up under the historical fallacies. How do we read history? How do we interpret it? Are we reconstructing historical events correctly, and what caused them?

In his concluding chapter, Carson quickly goes through several more fallacies in summary fashion, such as problems with literary genre, arguments from silence, statistical arguments and more.

In my opinion, every person who is serious about studying the Bible should read this book. It certainly helps in recognizing the pitfalls of interpreting the Bible, and teaches us to think more while we study the Bible. God, after all, is a thinking God!

Rob says

A brilliant little book that I will have to return to again. Dr. Carson describes errors in the interpretation of scripture in four broad categories: word study, grammatical, logical, and presuppositional fallacies. One could subtitle this work, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." The danger is when pastors know just a little Greek and draw seemingly profound but false conclusions.

For word studies, I was particularly intrigued by the notion that the Greek "agape" does not, in and of itself, mean God's love. There was in fact significant semantic range overlap with "phileo" due to homonymic clash between "kyneo" (to kiss) and "kyno" (to impregnate). So phileo took on the meaning of kyneo.

For grammatical fallacies, I was struck by the commentary on the aorist tense. Even though it is punctiliar, it does not necessarily mean it is a completed action. It simply refers to the action itself, a geometric point without magnitude, with no specification as to whether it is instantaneous, repeated, or some other aspect to the verb.

For logical fallacies, there were many great examples. I particularly liked the section on negative inferences. It does not necessarily follow that just because a proposition is true that the negative inference of such a proposition is also true.

Lastly, for presuppositional fallacies, one could argue it is a theme for the whole book - meaning distanciation. It is incumbent on the reader to be self aware of the biases he or she brings when reading historical materials. It really is an insidious problem, particularly in our current, politically correct culture.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and will keep it at the ready on my bookshelf.

Guillaume Bourin says

Definitely a must-read.

Jordan Shirkman says

Carson is brilliant, and he masterfully explains the most common exegetical errors related to New Testament interpretation relating to language, grammar, logic and history. Aimed at those familiar with Greek, but helpful to anyone who wants to be a faithful exegete.

He's no respecter of doctrinal strand when it comes to calling out faulty exegesis, and some examples and illustrations he gives are pretty comical. Brief, practical, and helpful.

Peter Krol says

I've never been this encouraged by a book this negative. Though I can see my own work in many of Carson's fallacies, I now have a way forward in avoiding them.

Cbarrett says

Returned to this yet again, an almost annual skim. Solid gold and good to be reminded not to dink around with the text and be aware of subtle ways to mishandle the Word in order to get it to say what I want. Should be required reading in seminaries. And maybe even in more places. But whatever.

Ben says

This book is a must-read for any Bible teacher, Pastor, or anyone handling God's word in any way.

Carson covers all the various areas of fallacies ranging from Word-Study, Grammatical, Logical, Presuppositional, and Historical fallacies.

The book is relatively easy to follow, and does not require knowledge of Greek, although it is helpful. It is also brief and to the point. Carson also does not simply point out the errors of others, he points out some of his own errors that he has made in teaching / preaching.

The unfortunate thing is, many preachers are still guilty of many of the fallacies Carson points out in this insightful work. Don't be guilty... read the book!
