

Exegetical Fallacies

by D. A. Carson

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 148pp., paperback,

The author is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

This book is a “must read” for anyone involved in interpreting and teaching God's Word. Within its pages, we are introduced to any number of questionable techniques and interpretations which are often applied to the interpretation of Scripture.

The primary value of the text is not so much in the specific examples (and there are many), but in the general principles. Carson summarizes near the end of the book (p. 123):

These are certainly not the only logical fallacies than [sic] can trip up those of us who are intimately involved in exegesis of the Bible; but they are among the most common. 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.

Most readers will recognize themselves in one or more of the examples of questionable inferences or conclusions made while preparing to teach from the Bible. Although this reviewer would quibble over some of the conclusions that Carson reaches in his examination of exegetical fallacies (e.g., his conclusion regarding any significance in the difference between agape vs. phileo in John 21:15-17), the treatment and breadth of material is excellent.

Carson groups fallacies into categories: (1) word-study fallacies; (2) grammatical fallacies; (3) logical fallacies; (4) presupposition and historical fallacies. Of these groups, this reviewer recognized items from the word-study and grammatical categories as most prevalent. A number of the examples are perpetuated in teaching heard today (e.g., interpreting the aorist as once-for-all action, agape as some special type of selfless love). If nothing else, Carson alerts us to be all the more careful before promulgating these common errors.

Highly recommended.

Review by [Tony Garland](#) of www.SpiritAndTruth.org.