Smoky Mountain Bible Institute
Philosophy 110 Logical Fallacies III

We continue to look at essential tools for intelligent debate by identifying and avoiding logical fallacies.

Tautology, also called a "circular argument", involves defining terms or qualifying an argument in such a way that it would be impossible to disprove the argument. Often, the rationale for the argument is merely a restatement of the conclusion, just using different words. Example: "The Bible is the word of God. We know this because the Bible itself tells us so." While this is a true statement, and Christians can agree that God's word is a reliable witness to its own authority, we must also admit that this statement does not follow the rules of logic. In order for something to be logically true, it must also be falsifiable. That is, it must be possible to present a counter-argument, which, if proven true, would disprove the original argument. In our example concerning the authority of Scripture, we can look at the many falsifiable truth claims made in the Bible, which *can* be challenged and verified. We find that these claims always stand up to objective scrutiny, confirming the trustworthiness of the Biblical record. We must also acknowledge, however, that when Scripture makes supernatural claims, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us access to faith in God's word. Another, simpler example of tautology example would be, "We used the bone in a rock layer to date the rock layer to 10 million years. It is clear that the bones are 10 million years old because we found them in the 10-million-year old rock layer."

Appeal to Authority attempts to justify an argument by citing a highly admired or well-known (but not necessarily qualified) figure who supports the conclusion being offered. Example: "If climate change is a concern of our politicians and all of those well-known Hollywood actors, then it is most certainly true." In reality, actual scientific data is what should be presented and discussed, rather than the opinions of politicians or actors.

Appeal to Tradition, A.K.A. "don't rock the boat" or "let sleeping dogs lie", cites precedent or tradition alone. Example: "We should continue to do things as they have been done in the past. We shouldn't challenge time-honored customs or traditions." "Because we have always done it that way" is not a good or logical reason to do anything, so no matter how old or new a process or tradition is, we should always know *why* we do what we do so that it does not lose its purpose or meaning, and likewise, so that we don't inhibit helpful changes without cause.

Appeal to the Crowd is a fallacy which refers to popular opinion or majority sentiment in order to provide support for a claim. Example: "If living together is immoral, then I have plenty of company." Moral norms and truth are not established by popular opinion, however, but by the Creator. Another example: "That professor's test was extremely unfair. Just ask anyone who took it." Fairness, however, is established by facts, not opinions. And finally, "Molecules-to-Man Evolution must be true since most scientists believe it." Scientific fact is determined using the scientific method, not by polling the beliefs of scientists. (Who, incidentally, are in fact much more divided on the issue than people like Bill Nye would have you believe.)

Slippery Slope, A.K.A. "the domino theory", suggests that if one step or action is taken, it will invariably lead to similar steps or actions, the end results of which are negative or undesirable. A slippery slope always assumes a chain reaction of cause-effect events which result in some eventual dire outcome. This was often used as a reason for our nation's involvement in the Vietnam conflict. "If we let them fall, then one country after another will similarly fall to communism." It is illogical to say that one event causes another, only because they are connected or similar. We can acknowledge their similarity or connectedness while at the same time acknowledging that one did not cause the other.

We will spend one more session on logical fallacies.