A LIST OF FREQUENT
HERMENEUTICAL ERRORS

Personalizing: Assuming that any or all parts of the Bible apply to you or your group in a way that they do not apply to everyone else. ("What Balaam's ass says to me is that I talk too much.") Also known as *individualizing.*

Universalizing: Assuming that something unique or uncommon in the Bible applies to everyone equally. ("We all have our Gethsemanes.") Also known as *generalizing.*

Spiritualizing: Assuming that events or factors have their real application in some religious truth beyond what they actually say. ("The lovely structure of the Jerusalem Temple encourages us to have our own lives well in order.")

Moralizing: Assuming that principles for living can be derived from all passages. ("We can learn much about parenting by noting how the father of the prodigal son handled his wayward child.") (The Egyptians drowned at the Red Sea because they had vacillated. You can't vacillate and expect to succeed in this life.")

Exemplarizing: Assuming that because someone in the Bible did something, it is an example for us to follow. ("To learn how to tell stories in sermons, let us examine Jesus' storytelling.") ("Let's see how Jesus

177

called disciples and let that be the model for our evangelism.") ("What can we learn about adversity from how the Israelites endured their years as slaves in Egypt?")

Allegorizing: Assuming that the components of a passage have meaning only as symbols of Christian truths. ("The 'lover' is Christ; the 'beloved' is the Church; the 'daughters of Jerusalem' are the Scriptures.")

Typologizing: Assuming that certain real biblical characters or things are mentioned in order to foreshadow other real—and more important—characters or things. ("Joshua has the same name as Jesus; as a conqueror he points to The Conqueror.") ("Ezra came to his people from afar; entered into Jerusalem on a donkey; prayed before crises; taught what was to many a new law; purified the nation, etc. His life points directly to the Savior.")

The Root Fallacy: Assuming that the/an original meaning of a word always attends its usage. ("To be holy means to be set apart.") [cf. terrible/terrific/terrifying]

Genre confusion: Assuming that the interpretational rules for one genre apply to another. ("Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard contains seven helpful perspectives on the value of hard work.") ("The Twenty-third Psalm teaches us how to care for those under our authority.") ("According to Deuteronomy 33, if we trust God we'll never lack anything.") ("But Proverbs promises that if we honor God we'll be well liked by everyone!")

Totality transfer: Assuming that all the possible meanings of a word or phrase go with it whenever it is used. ("Head [*kephale*], of course, means 'source' here, just as it does in Xenophon's reference to the source of a river.")

Argument from silence: Assuming that everything relevant to an issue is mentioned in the Bible every time that issue is mentioned. ("Notice that Paul does not explicitly condemn premarital sex anywhere in his letters.")

Argument from authority: Assuming that the views of "experts" or a preponderance of them must be correct. ("Smith, who has devoted his life

e the model for our evangelism.") ("What
y from how the Israelites endured their

components of a passage have meaning
ian truths. ("The 'lover' is Christ; the
'daughters of Jerusalem' are the Scrip-

tain real biblical characters or things are
adow other real—and more important—
la has the same name as Jesus; as a con-
queror.") ("Ezra came to his people from
on a donkey; prayed before crises; taught
v; purified the nation, etc. His life points

at the/an original meaning of a word
o be holy means to be set apart.") [cf. ter-

the interpretational rules for one genre
able of the workers in the vineyard con-
ives on the value of hard work.") ("The
us how to care for those under our
Deuteronomy 33, if we trust God we'll
Proverbs promises that if we honor God
ne!")

all the possible meanings of a word or
it is used. ("Head [kephale], of course,
it does in Xenophon's reference to the

g that everything relevant to an issue is
time that issue is mentioned. ("Notice
condemn premarital sex anywhere in his

ing that the views of "experts" or a pre-
correct. ("Smith, who has devoted his life

to studying Ruth, may be trusted . . .") ("Since this is held by few schol-
ars, it does not seem tenable.")

Israel-Church confusion: Assuming that things that apply to biblical Israel
also apply to the church. ("We can learn how to discipline trouble-
some kids from this law about stoning disobedient children.")

Israel-modern nation confusion: Assuming that things that apply to biblical
Israel also apply to modern nations ("According to 2 Chronicles 7:14,
if we pray and repent God will heal America.")

Israel-modern Israel confusion: Assuming that the modern, secular state
named Israel in the Near East is the Israel referred to in the Bible.
("How can we support the Saudis when they're the enemies of God's
chosen people?")

False combination: Joining two statements or passages in such a way as to
produce a hybrid conclusion. ("In Matthew 25 Jesus calls hell both
outer darkness and also fire, so hell fire must be some kind of special
divine fire that doesn't give off any light. You can feel it but you can't
see it.")

Figure of speech confusion: Failure to understand any of the many nonlit-
eral expressions in human speech, especially metaphors. ("Imagine
the massive scale of Canaanite dairy farming and beekeeping that led
to Canaan's being called a land flowing with milk and honey.")

Equivocation: Confusing a term or concept with another term or concept,
thus misunderstanding its meaning. ("1 Thessalonians 5 says to
'abstain from all appearance of evil' so you can't even ask directions
from a prostitute.")

False presupposition: Basing all or part of an argument or conclusion on
incorrect assumptions. ("The Hebrew mind thought concretely; the
Greek mind abstractly. This is why the OT has more rituals and the
NT more symbols.")