Exegetical Fallacies
Overview and adaptation of D.A. Carson’s book

I. Word Study Fallacies
   a. **Root Fallacy** [Determining the meaning of a word solely or primarily on etymology, it may have a connection, but does not have to have one.] “Nice” comes from the latin “nescius” which means ignorant. (so “nice” must be ignorant, right?). The Hebrew words for “bread” and “war” share the same root, but there is no real connection. Etymology can be helpful in working with unknown words in context or add insight to what may be a new usage.
   b. **Semantic Anachronism** [reading the late usage of a word back into earlier usages] Sometimes this is made worse when people take English equivalents like “dynamite” for “dynamis” (Greek for “power”)
   c. **Semantic Obsolescence** [importing an older meaning of a word into a modern usage when that older meaning has died out]
   d. **Appeal to Unknown or Unlikely Meanings**
   e. **Careless Appeal to Background Material**
   f. **Verbal Parallelogramatia** (taking possible parallels too far, and seeing parallels everywhere)
   g. **Linkage of language and mentality** (too much emphasis on how language and culture intersect to the point where language is seen to almost entirely constrain the thinking process of people)
   h. **False assumptions about technical meaning** (seeing every word as only a “technical” word without seeing the possibility that some words can have more then one meaning and be used variously)
   i. **Abuse of Synonyms** (seeing synonyms as having more in common then the text allows)
   j. **Unwarranted semantic disjunctions/restrictions** (strong either/or view of the meaning of a word)
   k. **Unwarranted restriction of the semantic field** (Not taking into account the wide range of meanings of words.) For instance, “nail the board”, “board of trustees”, “pay room and board”, “get on board”. There is a common word origin that explains the differing meanings, but the current usage has widened quite a bit.
   l. **Illegitimate totality transfer** (putting the entire range of a word’s meaning into one particular context) For instance, ekklesia “church” can also mean just “congregation” without any other particular theology.
   m. **Overly close correlation between Semitic word and Greek equivalent.** Don’t jump from Hebrew meaning to Greek without also looking at broad Hellenistic context of word usage.
   n. **Not acknowledging the uniqueness of each writer.** Writers can use the same words in different ways and mean different, even if many times similar, things.
   o. **Seeing language as a computer code.** This error sees language less as a living thing that changes over time based on usage, but more as a code where each word contains in itself the reference. Sometimes this is true: “Moses” references a real person. But some words cannot ideas “beautiful” for instance. This word has meaning but no referent.

II. Grammatical Fallacies. Basically remember that context of a word is more determinative then a technical grammar. Language over time becomes messy and syntax less precise. These fallacies primarily deal with the Greek in Carson’s book and so will be skipped on this list.

III. Logical Fallacies
   a. **False disjunctions.** Only allowing an either/or when the ideas may be complementary.
   b. **Failure to recognize distinctions.** Thinking that because x and y are similar in many ways they are the same.
   c. **Selective evidence.**
d. **Improperly handled syllogisms.** ie, All dogs are animals; a cat is an animal; therefore a cat is a dog.
e. **Negative inferences:** Thinking that just because the proposition is true, the negative inference must also be true. All adults can vote; Bob cannot vote; therefore Bob is not an adult. (maybe he is a felon? Maybe he is a citizen of another nation?)
f. **Worldview confusion.** Assuming our own experiences are the proper/best method of interpretation.
g. **Question framing.** “When did you stop beating your wife?” “Do you value education or are you a fundamentalist?”
h. **Confusion of truth and accuracy:** my home is close to my office; my home is about a mile and a half from my office; my home is 1.6 miles from my office. All of these are true with growing levels of accuracy.
i. **Purely emotive appeals.**
j. **Faulty generalization.** Using one example to make all encompassing general rules. For instance, Jesus did evangelism in different ways. It would be a mistake to take one example and decide that is how all evangelism should be done.
k. **Unwarranted associative jumps.** When a word or phrase triggers an associated idea that is then used to interpret the text beyond what it intended.
l. **False statements.**
m. **The non sequitur.** Remember that “A” does not necessarily follow “B”.
n. **Cavalier dismissal.**
o. **Equivocal argumentation.** Thinking that an argument delivers more then it can.
p. **Inadequate analogy.** The analogy presented as “proof” is not adequate enough to truly work. (also remember an analogy primarily demonstrates an argument, it does not prove it!)
q. **Abuse of “obviously”**. If it is obvious it needs not be said, if it needs to be said it is not obvious and should be argued.
r. **Simplistic appeals to authority.** What is the reason behind the source cited?

**IV. Presuppositional/Historical Fallacies**
a. **Reading one’s own theology into the text.** Basically, it is good to know your own prejudices and to study historical theology.
b. **Ignoring the bible’s overarching story line** (assumes the bible is a disjointed collection of stories)
c. **Working outside the Bibes “givens”.** Ie that God exists and has something meaningful to say in the scriptures.
d. **Uncontrolled historical reconstruction.** Putting speculative historical developments above the text. For instance, in terms of the Early Church, some speculation on development is allowable, but all we know about the Early Church is in the New Testament and so should be given veto over reconstructions.
e. **Fallacies of causation.** Thinking that if A came after B then B was causal to A; confusing correlation with causation; putting the effect before the cause; oversimplifying causes, ect.
f. **Motivational Fallacy.** Assuming we know more about the motives of a biblical writer then is possible to know. Psychoanalyzing everything.
g. **Conceptual parallelomania.** Like verbal above, but with concepts. Seeing parallel concepts everywhere.