Pastor's Note 9-26-20

Thinking Logically 3

Last week we discussed the fallacy of the false dichotomy. This week's fallacy is the "Straw Man Argument." This fallacy (or failure in logical and fac based argumentation relies on two lies. The first is an oversimplification of the opponent's position, and a misrepresentation of the opponent's position.. The opponent's argument is then presented in the worst possible light which makes it easy to ridicule or destroy. This straw-man presentation of the idea of one's opponent is then taken apart by a rigorous use of various 'proofs' that may or may not even address the subject but seem more reasonable compared to the straw man.

An example of a straw man argument might run like this:

Candidate X is a member of the NRA, which we know is supportive of people owning automatic rifles and machine guns. Many people are hurt or killed every year by these weapons. So, because Candidate X is pro-gun, he does not want to see people prevented from doing school mass shootings. In essence, Candidate is in favor of killing children. Would you vote for a candidate who wants to see children killed in school shootings?

What are the fallacies in this argument?

The exaggeration of the meaning of his association: Candidate X because he is a member of the NRA, must be in favor of everyone owning weapons which can kill many people. His mere association with the NRA casts a shadow over his character and moral position. By an extension of his pro-gun association, he must be in favor of killing children.

The straw man is that no one should vote for a candidate for public office who wants to see children killed in school shootings.

How can one defeat such an argument?

1. Deny the first premise of the argument: One would have to prove that the presumption that NRA members must be in favor of allowing everyone to have automatic rifles and machine guns was false.
2. Deny the extension of the premise that Candidate X was in favor of school shootings.
3. Deny the conclusion that Candidate X is unworthy of public office (your vote) by proving that he does not hold that position.

These kinds of things must be approached critically, and with research into actual facts instead of simply accepting the assumptions being made by those who oppose Candidate X. Find out if Candidate X has ever said that he supports or condemns school shooters, takes glee or finds it abhorrent that school children have been shot/killed. If he has a mixed record, then take that into account when making your political decision.

The key to defeating the straw man? If it sounds too simplistic, it might need a closer look before you make a commitment, one way or the other. The do your own research instead of accepting what you read or hear in the media—they may have an agenda behind their reporting. News Media of all stripes edit out inconvenient facts that do not support their narrative. Narratives as nothing but "spin" concocted to sway the public. They all rely on us being gullible fools. Don't be a fool.