

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
ONE

ETHICS IN SCRIPTURE



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STUDY GUIDE

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How to use this lesson and study guide

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Preparation** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule breaks** — Review the outline and the time codes to determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions in the outline.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Notes** — Use the Notes section to follow the lesson and to take additional notes. Many of the main ideas are already summarized in the notes, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Review Questions** — Questions on the basic content of the lesson. Answer review questions in the space provided. Review questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Application Questions** — Questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Outline

- I. Introduction (0:28)
- II. Definition (1:55)
 - A. God and Blessings (3:40)
 - 1. Divine Nature (4:32)
 - 2. Divine Actions (6:28)
 - B. Breadth of Issues (8:55)
 - C. Depth of Issues (11:48)
- III. Threefold Criteria (17:16)
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 - 2. Love (24:01)
 - B. Proper Standard (26:43)
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 - 2. All Scripture (30:41)
 - 3. General Revelation (33:42)
 - C. Proper Goal (35:15)
- IV. Threefold Process (39:22)
 - A. Tendencies (40:14)
 - B. Perspectives (42:28)
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 - C. Interdependence (55:15)
- V. Conclusion (59:52)

Notes

I. Introduction

II. Definition

Ethics is the study of moral right and wrong, the study of what is good and what is evil.

Christian ethics is: Theology, viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts and attitudes receive God's blessing and which do not.

A. God and Blessings

Our definition focuses on God and his blessing rather than on terms like good or evil, or right or wrong. Those things that receive God's blessing are good and right, whereas those things that do not receive his blessing are wrong and evil.

1. Divine Nature

God himself is the ultimate standard of right and wrong, of good and evil.

God is not accountable to any standard outside himself.

2. Divine Actions

God's actions demonstrate the standard of morality.

God shows his approval by bestowing blessings. He shows his hatred by withholding blessings and pouring out curses.

Many times the Bible communicates right and wrong by recording God's reactions rather than by explicitly labeling things good or evil.

B. Breadth of Issues

In the past, ethics was seen as a subsection of theology. Teachers of ethics frequently dealt with very small portions of theology and life.

Christian ethics touches every dimension of the Christian's life.

Every discipline of theology obligates us to believe certain facts, to do certain things and to feel certain emotions. Therefore, all theology involves ethics.

Theology is the application of the Word of God to all of life.

C. Depth of Issues

Ethics addresses not only behavior, but also the attitudes and natures of individual persons.

Scripture views attitudes as morally right or wrong.

Scripture demonstrates that our feelings may be morally right or morally wrong.

Scripture speaks of morally good and evil persons.

All unbelievers “exist in accordance with the flesh”; their natures are evil, and therefore their actions and attitudes are also evil.

Believers have new natures due to the Holy Spirit's indwelling. They have an antidote for the fallen nature, and possess the ability to conform to God's standard of ethics.

III. Threefold Criteria

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 16 paragraph 7:

"Works done by unregenerate men . . . may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God."

Unbelievers may do things that *resemble* our definition of ethical living, performing actions God commands.

Actions by unbelievers are not truly virtuous. These actions are not good enough to please God, or to earn the blessing of salvation.

A. Proper Motive

Unless a work is done with right motive, it is not a work that God will reward with blessings.

1. Faith

Only believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit can do works that God rewards with blessings.

Only believers have hearts that are purified by faith.

Saving faith motivates good works. This is the faith possessed by believers and only by believers.

2. Love

Our works are useless if they are not motivated by love.

Works and even spiritual gifts that produce beneficial results merit no reward if they are not motivated by love.

Love is an aspect of every law God requires us to obey. If we do not act in love, no work we do can conform to his standard.

Our love must be for both God and neighbor.

B. Proper Standard

In order for works to be good, they must be done according to the standard of the Word of God, God's revelation.

1. Commands

All the commands of Scripture are designed to guide us.

Everyone who sins is guilty of lawlessness, so all sin entails lawlessness. All sin violates God's law.

The process of application is complex. Obedience in one situation may look very different from obedience in another situation.

2. All Scripture

The proper standard requires submission to the whole Bible. God's word as a whole is a criterion of good works.

Paul insisted that all Scripture was useful for ethical training, that all Scripture places moral demands on us.

3. General Revelation

God's revelation given through creation is commonly called general revelation. It is part of the standard for good works.

Good works must conform to God's Word as it is revealed in the Law, in all of Scripture, and in creation.

C. Proper Goal

Good works may have any number of immediate goals.

Everything in the Christian life should be done in a way that honors God and brings him glory.

God approves of works intended to bring him glory, and he condemns works that disregard or oppose his glory.

IV. Threefold Process**A. Tendencies**

There are many different ways that believers try to make ethical choices in life, but they tend to fall into three main categories.

- Christian conscience and the leading of the Holy Spirit
- Scripture
- The outcome of actions

Moral decisions can be made properly only when all three directions are taken on any given issues.

Ethical judgment involves the application of God's Word to a situation by a person.

B. Perspectives

Ethics should be done from three perspectives.

- God's Word
- Situation
- Person

Let the insights from each perspective inform and influence the insights from the others.

1. Situational

- Problems
- Consequences of actions
- Goals

2. Normative

God's Word is the norm or standard for ethics. We are doing ethics from the normative perspective when we look to the Bible to tell us what to do.

3. Existential

When we approach ethics by asking questions that are specific to the people involved, we are doing ethics from an existential perspective.

C. Interdependence

Each perspective is the whole of ethics, viewed from one angle or another.

Unless we evaluate the situation in light of God's word, and unless we recognize how the situation bears on us as persons, we have not rightly understood the situation.

If we cannot apply the words of Scripture to our situations and selves, we really have not understood Scripture.

We cannot rightly understand the self unless we see it in the context of its situation and rightly interpret it by the Word of God.

V. Conclusion

Since we are not perfect, we must take advantage of all three perspectives so that we have all the information possible about ethical problems.

By using all three perspectives, we can provide ourselves with checks and balances to the insights of any single perspective.

5. Why must our works be done according the proper standard, and what is the proper standard for ethics?

6. Why must our works have a proper goal, and what should our goal be?

7. Summarize the threefold criteria for good works described in this lesson.

8. What are the three main tendencies that different Christian groups rely upon as they make ethical decisions?

9. Explain the three different perspectives that must be employed when approaching ethics.

10. What do we mean when we say that the three perspectives interact and depend on one another?

11. Summarize the biblical model for making ethical decisions.

Application Questions

1. Compare an ethical system based on God himself as the ultimate standard with an ethical system in which God is not the ultimate standard. How are they similar? How are they different?
2. Why should we think of application as part of theology? What dangers exist when we do not include application in our definition of theology?
3. Explain the idea that all feelings have moral consequences. Which biblical passages make this point most clearly?
4. Describe the most important difference between the similar actions of an unbeliever and a believer.
5. Why are faith and love the criteria for proper motives? What do these criteria reveal about what God and his values?
6. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What are some benefits to using *all* of Scripture for ethical training?
7. Which perspective do you most frequently rely upon in your decision making? What advantages and disadvantages does this preference offer you in your ethical decisions?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?