

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
FOUR

THE NORMATIVE
PERSPECTIVE: PARTS AND
ASPECTS OF 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 (0:27)
- II. Variety of Scripture (3:06)
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 - B. Literature (14:55)
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 - 1. Qualifications (40:31)
 - 2. Value (43:25)
 - 3. Application (45:19)
- IV. Unity of Scripture (59:49)
 - A. Commandment of Love (1:1:20)
 - B. Gospel of Grace (1:5:58)
 - C. New Covenant (1:13:34)
 - D. Harmony (1:18:14)
- V. Conclusion (1:24:35)

Notes

I. Introduction

In this lesson we will be focusing our attention on the different ways the various parts and aspects of Scripture communicate God's norms to us.

II. Variety of Scripture

Scripture communicates in many different ways.

A. Language

The Bible displays the full range of language that we find in human communication.

If we do not understand how each type of language communicates, we are likely to misunderstand the Bible.

1. Extraordinary

Those who believe that the Bible speaks in extraordinary ways often oversimplify biblical language, developing a system of interpretation that can be applied fairly equally to all of Scripture.

Middle ages mistake: Because the Bible is inspired by God, it communicates in extraordinary ways that exceed human comprehension.

Many Christians have insisted that Scripture's extraordinary nature makes its language easy to interpret.

2. Ordinary

The Bible communicates in ordinary human language, using all the normal conventions of human communication.

Clarity of Scripture implies:

- The Bible is not obscure
- It is not filled with hidden meanings that can only be discovered through:
 - Mysterious means
 - Special spiritual gifting
 - Special offices in the church

In many passages, an overly literal reading would be terribly misleading.

The Bible uses the linguistic conventions of its authors and their original audiences.

We have to learn how the authors and original audiences ordinarily used language, and what each author's intent was when he wrote.

B. Literature

There are many different forms or genres of literature in Scripture.

Ethics generally focuses on passages in the Bible that contain laws, or that directly teach moral standards and obligations.

Biblical narratives also communicate ethical rules and regulations.

Every passage in the Bible reveals God's character and contains ethical teaching, regardless of the type of literature.

The authors of biblical historical records commented on the goodness or evil of many of the characters, attitudes and events in their stories.

Every type of literature is normative; every type of literature teaches us something about the way we should think, act and feel.

C. Implications

Scripture's variety implies that our own teaching of ethics might benefit from the use of multiple genres.

III. God's Law in Scripture

God's law in scripture includes those portions of the Bible that address ethics most explicitly.

“God’s Law” in these lessons: portions of Scripture written in the literary form of a legal code.

The Law contains the clearest and most explicit expressions of many of God’s ethical requirements.

A. Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments have a special primacy over Scripture’s other commandments.

- Historical
- Theological

First written legal code received by the nation of Israel.

Book of the Covenant: Additional laws received with the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments had theological or ideological primacy.

God carved the Ten Commandments in the stone tablets. The giving of the Law was attended by thunder and lightning, smoke, clouds and heavenly trumpets.

Moses identified the Ten Commandments as God's very covenant with his people.

The Ten Commandments were placed within the Ark of the Covenant.

Jesus confirmed the importance of the Ten Commandments.

B. Three Types of Law

It has been common to categorize the various laws of the Old Testament into three major groups:

- Moral — God’s ethical standards; usually identified with the Ten Commandments

- Civil — provide for the governing of society

- Ceremonial — provide instruction for worshipping God

1. Qualifications

Scripture does not give state that there are distinct types of laws.

Scripture presents some laws as belonging to more than one category.

2. Value

Threefold division helps us see that the Law regulated all of life.

Threefold division reflects a genuine distinction that Scripture draws between the three offices that governed Israel's theocracy:

- Prophet
- Priest
- King

When the Bible gives us extensive information about applying one law, but very little about a similar law, it is reasonable to use the insights from the first to inform our understanding of the second.

3. **Application**

Many theologians affirm the traditional categories of Old Testament Law, but disagree on how to apply these categories to the study of ethics.

God's people are no longer to perform many of the specific behaviors that were required under the Mosaic sacrificial and temple system.

The specific requirements of the civil laws no longer apply. They have "expired."

The civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have expired in the sense that we are not to return to Old Testament patterns of life.

In another sense, Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws still apply to modern Christians.

Reasons Christians should still look to the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, as well as to its moral laws, for ethical guidance:

- God's character requires us to learn from the revelation these laws provide.
- Scripture teaches the continuing modern application of every Old Testament law.
- Every law will continue to reveal God's standard until everything is accomplished.

- The Law stands together, without regard to distinctions between ceremonial, civil or moral divisions.

- All of Scripture, not just some parts, is for our moral instruction.

- Ceremonial and civil laws are useful for training us in the ways of righteousness.

It is important to know how to include these types of law in our ethical evaluations.

No law can be properly understood or applied without considering both the situation to which it is applied and the person who applies it.

The same aspect of God's character is applied in different ways in different situations.

As priest, Christ fulfills the ceremonial aspects of the Law.

As king, Christ fulfills the civil aspects of the Law.

As prophet, Christ fulfills the moral aspects of the Law.

IV. Unity of Scripture

The law relates to the other portions of God's written revelation.

A. Commandment of Love

Jesus: The commandment to love God is the greatest commandment.

Jesus: The commandment to love our neighbor is the second most important law.

Paul: The command to love our neighbor is inseparable from every other command because all of Scripture's commands teach us how to love our neighbor.

Neither Jesus nor Paul intended to replace the many stipulations of the law with a simpler formula requiring only love for God and neighbor.

B. Gospel of Grace

Common misunderstanding: the Law is contrary to the gospel of grace.

Three different ways the Law is used in Scripture:

- First use of the Law — pedagogical use; Law as teacher.

- Second use of the Law — civil use; to restrain sin in society.

- Third use of the Law —normative; Law as a guide or rule for faithful Christians.

Paul wrote about his own experience with the pedagogical use of the Law in Romans 7:7-8.

The pedagogical use of the Law does not directly apply to believers. Once a person has been driven to Christ, the Law has finished its work in this regard.

The civil or second use of the law involves the way the Law restrains sin by threatening punishment against those who violate it.

This use of the law is for believers and unbelievers alike. It focuses on God's place for civil government as an instrument for restraining evil.

The normative use applies the Law as a revelation of God's will for Christian living.

When the Law is used as a standard for Christian behavior, it is perfectly compatible with the gospel.

Believers are not "under law" in the sense that we suffer its curse when we sin. We are "under law" in the sense that we receive its blessings, and in the sense that we are obligated to obey it.

C. New Covenant

Redemptive history and the new covenant: the changes that took place between the Old and New Testament eras as a result of the work of Jesus Christ.

In the new covenant we internalize the Law and keep it earnestly.

God's Word was always supposed to be in the hearts and minds of his people, and it really was in the hearts and minds of many, even under the old covenant.

D. Harmony

God's laws never actually conflict with one another, just as God's character never conflicts with itself.

Because the Law is unified, its various commands *collectively* require our obedience.

We will never understand the entire Law perfectly, so from time to time we will feel torn between God's various laws.

God's laws are given with the implicit understanding that at times some laws take priority over others.

Giving priority to one law over another is actually in accordance with the whole of the law. Therefore, it is not a conflict between particular laws.

Biblical laws are given with the implicit understanding that there are exceptions to rules.

General principles sometimes indicate contrary courses of action. Look at every command and principle, and measure the situation and motivations in light of every obligation.

V. Conclusion

9. What harmony exists among all divine commands?

10. How is Scripture's unity displayed in regard to the Law?

Application Questions

1. In light of the Bible's ordinary use of language, how should you approach Scripture?
2. How should your knowledge of biblical history influence your behavior?
3. A friend of yours asks; "How can it be that in one sense the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws have expired, but in another sense they still apply?" How would you answer your friend's question?
4. How can the "love command" and all other biblical laws be aspects of each other?
5. What reason to obey the law does the new covenant give you?
6. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?