

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
SEVEN

THE SITUATIONAL
PERSPECTIVE:
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS



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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. God (3:43)
 - A. Authority (5:00)
 - 1. Absolute (5:35)
 - 2. Exclusive (8:54)
 - 3. Exhaustive (10:08)
 - B. Control (11:37)
 - 1. Sovereign (12:14)
 - 2. Moral (17:56)
 - C. Presence (20:25)
 - 1. Covenant King (20:43)
 - 2. Incarnate Lord (24:16)
 - 3. Ministering Spirit (27:31)
- III. Creation (33:47)
 - A. Preternatural (35:21)
 - 1. Inhabitants (36:52)
 - 2. Spiritual Warfare (43:23)
 - B. Natural (46:14)
 - 1. Creation (46:26)
 - 2. Fall (48:30)
 - 3. Redemption (51:35)
- IV. Humanity (56:26)
 - A. Society (56:45)
 - 1. Solidarity (57:14)
 - 2. Commonality (1:08:22)
 - 3. Community (1:10:51)
 - B. Individuals (1:16:08)
 - 1. Character (1:17:03)
 - 2. Experiences (1:18:06)
 - 3. Body (1:20:48)
 - 4. Roles (1:24:21)
- V. Conclusion

Notes

I. Introduction

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

Facts include everything that exists.

II. God

God is the ultimate fact in our situation because he gives existence and meaning to every other fact.

A. Authority

God's right to rule derives from the fact that he is the creator and sustainer of all creation.

1. Absolute

God has complete and total freedom over what he has created.

God may do whatever he pleases with everything he has made:

- act upon it as he sees fit
- require of it whatever he desires
- judge it according to his own standards

2. Exclusive

Only God possesses absolute authority.

God's authority is always superior to creaturely authority.

3. Exhaustive

God's authority extends over everything he has created, in every detail:

- All creatures are under God's authority.
- No aspect of creation is morally neutral

B. Control

God powerfully governs everything that exists.

1. Sovereign

God has an unlimited ability and an unlimited right to control the creation in any way he sees fit.

Open Theism teaches that in order for God to hold human beings responsible, human beings must have ultimate control over our lives.

God's sovereign control is completely compatible with human responsibility.

God's sovereign control is the basis for ethical responsibility.

2. Moral

Creation is conducive to morality.

God always provides the means and the opportunity to avoid sin.

Circumstances never excuse unethical choices.

C. Presence**1. Covenant King**

Our first parents were vassal kings whose job it was to spread God's kingdom throughout the earth.

God was manifestly present to:

- bless them when they were faithful
- curse them when they sinned

God's is here to enforce his judgments over all the earth and its inhabitants.

2. Incarnate Lord

When Jesus was born, God became physically present and walked freely among society as one of us.

Ethical results of the Incarnation:

- Forgiveness

- Firsthand Sympathy

- Pattern of Righteousness

- Moral Victory

3. Ministering Spirit

When Jesus ascended into heaven he poured forth his Spirit on the church.

a. Indwelling

The Holy Spirit indwells individual believers, enabling and motivating us to make ethical decisions.

When the Holy Spirit gives us new life, he also gives us moral ability, so that we can do good works.

b. Gifting

The Holy Spirit gives believers supernatural abilities to perform works of service for the church.

Since the time of Pentecost, every believer in the church has been spiritually gifted.

III. Creation

Three basic realms:

- supernatural (above nature) — God and his works
- natural — the world God created in Genesis chapter 1
- preternatural (beyond nature) — the realm inhabited by invisible spirits such as angels and demons

A. Preternatural

Modern Christians, especially in western cultures, often pay little attention to angels and demons.

1. Inhabitants

Angels and demons are intelligent, rational beings that have wills and personalities.

All preternatural beings were originally angels.

a. Angels

Angels serve as God's loyal messengers and agents. They communicate his word to human beings, and interact with humanity.

By observing God's salvation of humanity, Angels learn more about the Lord's glory and are better able to praise him.

b. Demons

Demons are fallen, rebellious angels.

Demons are able to interact with the natural realm, which they do in order to harm us.

2. Spiritual Warfare

Ever since Satan and the rest of the demons rebelled against God, they have been locked in battle against God's holy angels.

Jesus has crippled the demons' ability to overtake us.

The demons will continue to attack us until God judges them on the last day.

B. Natural

1. Creation

Human beings are:

- of central importance upon the earth
- part of nature
- lords and rulers over nature

2. Fall

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God cursed both the human race and the earth, subjecting them to corruption.

Nature is:

- the recipient of God's cursing
- the instrument of God's cursing

The earth still proclaims God's goodness and majesty, and God uses it to provide many good things.

3. Redemption

In redemption, the effects of the fall are reversed. The natural realm becomes:

- an instrument of redemption

- a recipient of redemption

God places great value on nature. So, we need to consider how our choices will impact the natural creation.

IV. Humanity**A. Society****1. Solidarity**

God views the human race as a unified group.

a. Corporate Task

Cultural Mandate — God's command that human beings expand his kingdom to the ends of the earth through the development of human culture.

God has assigned the task to the human race as a whole, as a singular corporate entity

The individual must cooperate with all of humanity in accomplishing this corporate task.

b. Corporate Failure

Adam and Eve each violated their assigned individual roles. In the process, they violated the corporate task they had been given.

The Fall involved the sins of Adam and Eve as individuals, and the breakdown of their relationship.

c. Corporate Consequences

God's covenant governed:

- God's relationship with Adam and Eve as individuals
- Adam and Eve collectively
- every human being who has ever existed or ever will exist

One transgression condemned every individual of the human race to the covenant curses.

The only exception was Jesus, who did not descend from Adam and Eve after the manner of normal human reproduction.

Because we are corrupted by sin:

- We have to question our moral instincts and intuitions.
- The human race does not fulfill the cultural mandate in the way God intended.
- We have to test and prove our motives and behaviors.

d. Corporate Reconstitution

God's plan for creation is to build a kingdom — a new social structure and a new society inhabited by renewed people.

When Jesus returns, corporate social structures will be completely redeemed as well.

We need to focus on:

- personal redemption
- godly social structures such as families, church congregations, and nations.

2. Commonality

Within each smaller social group on earth there are fundamental similarities that bind the group together.

It is important to adapt our behavior to the shared experiences of the people around us.

3. Community

a. Impact

The decisions and actions of individuals often impact the people around them:

- Ethical decisions and actions impact others in ways that glorify God.
- Unethical decisions and actions impact others in ways that promote sin.

We must make decisions that:

- benefit and do not hurt others
- encourage others to behave in ethical ways

b. Responsibilities

We have many different responsibilities toward each other.

Our responsibility to love one another:

- encompasses all of life
- demands our time, money, possessions, and lives
- must be reflected in all our ethical decisions

B. Individuals

There are many important ways in which every person is unique.

1. Character

Character — things like individual preferences, temptations and sanctification

2. Experiences

Most of our experiences are very common, but the combination of experiences is unique to each person.

In one sense we all face the same temptation to violate God's law. But each of us feels this temptation in a different way.

3. Body

Many facts related to our bodies come into play in ethical situations:

- Age
- Abilities
- Disabilities
- Genetics
- Intellectual abilities

Some facts related to our bodies are insufficient to influence our ethical obligations:

- Sin inhabits our bodies, preventing us from being able to obey God.
- Indwelling sin does not exempt us from responsibility.

Even when our bodies make it easy and natural for us to sin, they do not excuse us.

4. Roles

Each of us has multiple roles in life. Each of our roles presents us with particular temptations and responsibilities.

V. Conclusion

9. Explain the importance of human individuality to ethical decisions in terms of character, experiences, body, and roles.

Application Questions

1. What are some typical excuses people use to avoid submitting to what God has clearly commanded? Why do we make such excuses?
2. How would you explain to a friend that God orders creation in such a way that our circumstances never excuse our unethical choices?
3. Why is it important to recognize that God is in complete control over all creation, and that humanity is still morally responsible?
4. How is God's presence with us as royal judge a critical fact to consider as we make ethical decisions?
5. Why should Christians take comfort from the fact that Jesus is our mediator?
6. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' earthly presence as the supreme pattern of righteousness?
7. Besides indwelling us, the Holy Spirit gives believers special abilities to perform works of service for the church. What does this purpose imply about the proper use of spiritual gifts?
8. We are engaged in a spiritual war, but James 1:14 still says that we fall into sin because of our own evil desire. How do our sinful desires and our enemies work together? What can we do to combat our sinful desires and our enemies?
9. Describe how a recent decision has affected other people. Did it benefit them or hurt them? Did it encourage them to behave more ethically, or did it encourage them to sin.
10. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?