

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
TEN

THE EXISTENTIAL
PERSPECTIVE: CHOOSING
GOOD



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, 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.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **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**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are 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.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:27)

In order to do the right thing, we have to:

- get the right information
- assess it correctly
- apply it in the right way

Human beings use a variety of capacities and abilities to make ethical decisions:

- experience
- imagination
- reason
- conscience
- emotions
- heart
- will

II. Acquiring Knowledge (4:23)**A. Experience (5:10)**

Experience: awareness of persons, objects and events.

Human beings gain knowledge through many different types of experiences.

Each experience produces knowledge about:

- about God
- or about the world around us
- or about ourselves

Knowledge helps us discern good from evil.

1. Physical (6:49)

The primary way that we gain information about God, people, objects and our environment is through our sensory perception.

God has given us our senses as important tools for gaining knowledge. As a result, our senses tend to be reliable.

Humanity's fall into sin has affected our sensory perceptions:

- illnesses
- physical abnormalities
- illusions

2. Mental (11:59)

The whole process of gaining knowledge can be assessed from the perspective of our mental experience. Ultimately our knowledge resides in our minds.

Just like our physical experience, our mental experience is affected by sin.

B. Imagination (14:38)

Imagination is our ability to form mental images of things that are beyond our experience.

1. Creativity (15:36)

Imagination is involved in everything that we make or create.

Imagination helps us to form and to recognize moral patterns and analogies.

2. Time (20:11)

Imagination can help us think about things that do not exist at the moment we are thinking about them.

Without our ability to imagine the future, we would not be able to apply God's Word to our lives.

3. Distance (21:24)

When people and things are so distant from us that they are not currently part of our experience, we have to use our imaginations to think about them.

We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us:

- evaluate our imagination according to God's Word
- harmonize it with our other abilities and capacities

III. Assessing Knowledge (24:43)

Assessing knowledge: we evaluate the information we have received.

A. Reason (25:00)

Christians often go to extremes when they think about the role of reason in ethics:

- Extreme 1: Reason is trusted above all other abilities and capacities.
- Extreme 2: Reason ignores the personal leading of the Holy Spirit

Our intellect comes from God, and the Holy Spirit helps us use it rightly. It has an important role to play in our decision-making process.

Reason:

- The capacity to make logical inferences and to judge logical consistency.
- The ability to think in coherent and orderly ways, and to make judgments that accord with biblical patterns of thought.

Every time sensory data is processed mentally, we are exercising reason to some degree.

Reason permits us to compare different facts to each other to determine their logical relations.

Reason helps us relate statements of fact to statements of duty.

Scripture uses reason and it regularly calls on us to do the same.

B. Conscience (31:58)

Conscience: God-given ability to discern good and evil.

Our conscience can:

- Give true affirmation that our behavior is pleasing to God.
- Rightly condemn us as guilty and encourage us to repent.

Our conscience has been corrupted by sin and is bound to make mistakes from time to time:

- condemning good
- approving sin

The solution to sin's corrupting influence is to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit who works within us as we strive to conform our conscience to God's Word.

C. Emotions (37:00)

Emotions: inner feelings; the affective aspects of our ethical sensitivity.

Our emotions are often our initial interpretation of the facts.

Emotions are useful tools for determining how God's Word applies to our modern lives.

- Feelings of compassion help us see the importance of helping those in need.
- Stirring of anger can persuade us of the value of pursuing justice.
- Experiences of joy can enable us to see and affirm God's goodness.
- Fear can cause us to search for ways to avoid sin.
- Feelings of guilt can alert us to times we have fallen into sin.
- Feelings of love can teach us how to provide, protect, admonish, and show mercy.

Our emotions are corrupted by sin and therefore subject to error.

We must submit our emotions to the Holy Spirit and God's Word, and harmonize them with our other God-given abilities and capacities.

IV. Applying Knowledge (44:04)

It is not enough simply to figure out what we ought to do. We have to make a conscious choice to do the right thing, and we have to follow through with that choice.

A. Heart (45:18)

Heart: the seat of moral knowledge and moral will; our whole inner person considered from the perspective of what we know, and what we do with our knowledge.

1. Commitments (46:29)

Our commitment to God should govern the fundamental direction of our entire life. All our other commitments should serve this most basic one.

Our commitments always express themselves in our works:

- We express our commitment to God in good works.
- We express our commitment to sin in evil works.

We choose according to the commitments that we feel most greatly at the moment that we choose.

Because sin still dwells in us, every Christian has mixed commitments.

We submit to the Holy Spirit as he conforms our commitments to God's character. We reject and change those commitments that flow from sin.

2. Desires (51:24)

Christians have both good and bad desires in our hearts.

There are only two kinds of decisions — good and evil:

- Every good decision is made according to desires from the Holy Spirit.

- Every evil decision is made according to sinful desires.

Our greatest desire should always be to please God.

B. Will (55:42)

Will: capacity for making decisions; volition; ability to make choices.

Our will is affected by our fallen nature. For the Christian:

- The Holy Spirit enables us to make decisions that please God.
- Indwelling sin may persuade us to make sinful decisions.

Our will may be:

- active

- passive

Our will is involved in each and everything we choose to think, say or do. It is the faculty we use to make every decision in our lives.

We must will what God's Word commands, and we must allow the Holy Spirit working within us to influence our will in positive ways.

Example of all existential capacities and abilities in an ethical decision by Jesus:

- acquired knowledge
 - experience
 - imagination
- assessed knowledge
 - reason
 - conscience
 - emotions
- applied knowledge
 - heart
 - will

V. Conclusion (1:03:22)

3. Why is acquiring knowledge important to the process of making ethical decisions?

4. What is reason? Why and how should we use reason in ethics?

5. What is the conscience and how should it be used?

6. What are emotions? How do they help us make ethical decisions?

7. Why is assessing knowledge important to the process of making ethical decisions?

8. What is the heart? How does it function in the decision-making process?

9. What is the will? What role does it play in the decision-making process?

10. Why is applying knowledge important to the process of making ethical decisions?

Application Questions

1. How have you tended to make ethical decisions in the past? What inward dispositions and faculties have you relied on most? What inward dispositions and faculties have you tended to ignore?
2. Why is it important to utilize imagination when studying the Scriptures?
3. How does a correct understanding of the role of reason lead to good ethical decisions?
4. Discuss a time when your conscience was wrong. How can we distinguish when our conscience is right from when it is wrong?
5. If we feel emotionally indifferent or detached from our sin, how might we be brought to repentance?
6. In Luke 6:45, Jesus referred to our commitments as the things that are stored up in our hearts and that express themselves in our works. What do your works and your speech suggest about the commitments of your own heart?
7. Practically speaking, our inward dispositions, capacities and faculties are often in tension with each other. Under these conditions, what are some things we can do to ensure that we make the most biblical, responsible decisions possible?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this lesson?
9. What is the most significant insight you have learned from the series *Making Biblical Decisions*?