

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
TWO

THE NORMATIVE
PERSPECTIVE: GOD AND HIS
WORD



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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 (0:30)

II. God as Standard (4:15)

God is the absolute ethical norm because he is not accountable to any standard outside or above himself.

A. God in Himself (5:44)

1. Personal Attribute (6:17)

God himself is the standard by which all morality is measured.

Goodness and rightness are derived from the goodness of God's person.

God is presented as the absolute moral law:

- The Lord is set forth as the apex of perfection, totally without flaw.
- We measure our own goodness against God's actions and character.

Goodness consists of the attitudes, values, motives, desires and goals that the living God has within his own heart.

2. Ultimate Standard (11:04)

There is no higher standard than God's person. God's goodness is the ultimate standard for all goodness.

At times biblical writers measure God against the Bible.

When biblical authors compared God to the standard of the Law, they reflected on how the law expresses God's character.

B. God as Judge (15:00)

God has the ultimate prerogative to determine whether or not particular actions, emotions or thoughts meet or transgress his moral requirements.

God will make the ultimate determination of whether or not we have lived morally or immorally, and his judgments will be utterly binding.

God's judgments are perfect, exhibiting flawless insight and wisdom, unfailing fairness and impeccable morality.

C. Implications (19:53)

God's power and authority to judge obligate his creatures to live according to the standard of his character.

Mankind is obligated to obey and to imitate God.

Many people disregard God's commands and invent their own rules for their lives.

Our obligation to obey God's standard is related to our forgiveness in Christ.

Those who have Jesus as savior are obligated to obey him as Lord.

III. Word as Standard (24:55)

We must rely on God's revelation or Word as our practical norm.

A. Three categories (26:31)

Traditionally, theologians have spoken of God's revelation primarily in two categories: special revelation and general revelation.

Three types of revelation:

- Special revelation
- General revelation (God's revelation in creation and history)
- Existential revelation (God's revelation in persons)

B. Normative Character (27:57)**1. General Revelation (28:30)**

Creation and history teach us true things about God and his moral requirements.

General revelation cannot teach us everything, but it speaks clearly enough to teach us true things about God.

a. Complexity

Some aspects of general revelation are common to all people. Others are restricted to very limited groups of people.

Some general revelation is known by so few people that it appears very similar to special revelation.

The historical fact of the resurrection obligates all people to repent. This type of general revelation is very similar to special revelation because it is rare and unusual.

b. Importance

Scripture is the supreme form of revelation in our day, but we affirm the validity and binding authority of general revelation.

God has exhibited his character through what he has made, and through his continual interaction with what he has made.

Everyone who acts contrarily to what God has revealed is guilty of sin.

God's revelation in creation and history is clear, but people reject it and convince themselves of falsehood.

2. Special Revelation (46:06)

Special revelation is a norm that is binding on our lives.

a. Complexity

Most forms rely on the spoken or written word, but all involve God communicating with people in ways that transcend the normal workings of creation.

God interrupts the natural course of events in order to communicate more directly with his people.

Revelations that come through the most distant mediation are the least obviously special. Those that come most directly from God are the most obviously special.

The only universally acknowledged form of current special revelation is Scripture.

Scripture has some parts that are very special and other parts that are a bit more common.

b. Importance

All special revelation is a standard to which we must adhere.

When God reveals truth through his authoritative representatives (e.g., biblical prophets and apostles), this revelation is binding.

In our day, we no longer have living authoritative apostles and prophets.

The Bible is binding on all people at all times.

3. Existential Revelation (49:38)

A different way of categorizing a portion of general revelation.

God uses councils, ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits to reveal his will to his people. Their determinations must be subject to Scripture.

a. External aspects

The external aspects of existential revelation include such things as:

- Human existence
- Human judgment, both individual and corporate
- Human behavior.

Because we reflect God's character, we can learn many things about God by looking at people.

Individual and corporate human judgment is closely related to the fact that we are created in God's image.

God uses human behavior as an external type of existential revelation.

b. Internal aspects

Illumination of the Holy Spirit: a divine gift of understanding that God gives to believers, and even to unbelievers.

God implants in every human being a basic knowledge of his law.

Inward leading of the Holy Spirit: More emotive and intuitive.

C. Unity (1:05:32)

General, special and existential revelation:

- Reveal the same God
- Reveal the same standard
- Are binding and authoritative

We should inform all our ethical judgments by all the revelation available to us.

IV. Conclusion (1:07:35)

3. Describe the three categories of revelation that are part of God's Word.

4. How does general revelation teach us about God's standard?

5. How does special revelation teach us about God's standard?

6. How does existential revelation teach us about God's standard?

7. How are general, special and existential revelation interconnected?

Application Questions

1. In what ways do you strive to know God? Give an example of a time when knowing God has revealed a proper course of action to you.
2. How do people respond to the fact that God is the absolute moral judge? What human parallels make this idea easier to understand? What human parallels make this truth harder to understand?
3. Read 1 John 1:7. Why did John say that our obligation to obey God's standard is related to our forgiveness in Christ?
4. Describe some true things about God that you have learned through general revelation.
5. Describe some true things about God that you have learned through special revelation.
6. How may believers learn truth about God by looking at other people?
7. Give an example of the Holy Spirit's illumination in your life. Give an example of the Holy Spirit's illumination in the life of an unbeliever.
8. Explain the importance of using all forms of God's revelation in making ethical decisions.
9. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?