

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
THREE

THE NORMATIVE
PERSPECTIVE: THE
ATTRIBUTES OF SCRIPTURE



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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)

No matter what the ethical question, we always have at least one document that we need to take into account, namely the Bible.

God's Word is our authoritative revealed standard. It infallibly teaches us about God's character.

II. Divine Authorship (4:00)

The Bible is God's word to his people.

A. Power of Scripture (4:57)

The Bible does not just tell us what to do; it also empowers us to believe and to live in ways that please God and lead to his blessings.

1. Examples (6:02)

God's word is powerful even when it does not take the form of Scripture.

a. Over creation

God's word is powerful over the creation.

God's declarations transmit his power. God's words are the means he uses to accomplish his ends.

b. Prophetic word

God's word has power when it comes through the mouths of inspired prophets.

c. Uninspired preaching

God works through the preaching of the gospel, even when the preacher is not infallibly inspired.

God uses preaching to bring people to faith.

d. Scriptures

Reading the Bible has even more power than witnessing a resurrection from the dead.

The Bible carries God's power, just as preaching does.

2. Implications (14:40)

God's word is living and active.

The word of God judges our hearts. It is able to penetrate and to evaluate our deepest thoughts and motives.

Scripture has the power to equip us for every good work.

Constant learning and meditation on the word of God brings us into contact with the power of God that will always accomplish his purposes.

B. Authority of Scripture (18:04)

Because the Bible is divinely inspired, it carries God's authority.

1. Claim of authority (19:10)**a. Historical examples**

In the earliest history recorded in the Bible, God spoke directly to humanity, and his speech carried authority.

In the days of Moses, God encoded his spoken word in written form.

God's spoken word is the basis for his written word.

God's written word is his authoritative covenant document that his people are obligated to obey.

Jesus frequently appealed to Scripture to justify and explain his actions.

Paul believed that the Scriptures are God's authoritative word, and that they bind New Testament believers.

b. Explicit claims

The Bible proves its authority through explicit statements.

Because prophecies were inspired and authorized by God, they form a binding moral standard to which we must pay attention.

The ongoing authority of Scripture is based on the authority of the one who gave the command, namely God.

The New Testament consists of documents that the apostles either wrote or approved. It carries the authority of the apostles, which is the authority of Christ himself.

2. Implications (28:31)

Because Scripture carries God's authority, we are morally obligated to conform all of our choices, actions, thoughts and feelings to it.

a. Breadth

People must keep the breadth of biblical instruction. Followers of Christ are not to obey what we like and to ignore what we do not like.

We all fall into the trap of unconscious selectivity. We must constantly be reminded of those commands we may have overlooked or forgotten.

b. Depth

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible connects obedience to Scripture with love for God.

The moral requirements God places on us are based in his love for us and are to be fulfilled in our love for him.

Only when we embrace the Scriptures from the heart can we rightly submit to the authority of God's word.

III. Human Audience (34:50)

God wanted to give his people clear revelation concerning his will and his character in order that they would be better able to conform themselves to him.

A. Clarity of Scripture (35:54)

When we say that Scripture is "clear," we do not mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand.

The Bible is not obscure. It is not filled with hidden meanings that can only be discovered through mysterious means.

The Bible's clarity is sometimes called "perspicuity."

1. Nature (36:44)

Scripture speaks plainly about the gospel. Every mentally competent person should be able to figure out that salvation comes through repentance and faith in Christ.

Scripture is not very plain regarding some of its teachings.

God keeps some secrets from us. He does not tell us everything he knows, nor does he tell us everything we might want to know.

What God has told us in Scripture is not a secret. The Scriptures fall into the category of “things revealed.”

2. Implications (41:25)

Through “due use of the ordinary means” (e.g., reading and studying), we can come to know God’s will for all areas of our life.

All Scripture is clear enough to be useful.

Not everyone has an equal ability to understand the Bible.

If we apply ourselves sufficiently, we can all come to know God’s will well enough to conform ourselves to his standard for morality.

B. Necessity of Scripture (43:11)

When we speak of the necessity of Scripture, we have in mind that people need the Bible, especially for ethical decision making.

1. Salvation (43:51)

Scripture is generally necessary for people to find the way of salvation.

Theologians typically recognize cases involving infants or other mentally incompetent individuals as exceptions to this general principle.

Human beings by and large receive knowledge of the gospel either through their own reading of the Bible or through preaching based on the Bible.

Scripture is inspired by God, infallible, and absolutely authoritative in every case. Preaching is not.

Scripture is necessary both as a record of the gospel, and a basis and criterion for the preaching of the gospel.

2. Faithful Living (48:01)

While general and existential revelation are infallible and authoritative, they are much harder to interpret than Scripture.

It is through the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks most clearly.

3. Implications (50:10)

Scripture is necessary to our ability to behave morally.

Scripture contains information that is not included in general and existential revelation.

In many circumstances, general and existential revelation are not clear enough to show us the proper course of action. Scripture reveals God's word in sufficient detail to teach us what is right.

C. Sufficiency of Scripture (54:28)

Scripture is able to fulfill the purposes for which it was written.

1. Purpose (55:25)

Scripture's purpose is manifold.

By studying the Bible, we can learn the things that are necessary for us to know if we are to be saved.

If we rightly understand the whole Bible, then we will know God's standards sufficiently to make proper determinations about any given ethical issue (as long as we also have a sufficient understanding of the persons and the situation).

Scripture lays down principles that we can extend and apply beyond the specifics mentioned in the Bible.

The ethical ordinances of men are valid and binding insofar as they echo biblical norms. When human norms contradict biblical norms, the Christian is obligated to defy them.

2. Misunderstandings (1:04:38)

a. Overestimate

Typically, those who overestimate the sufficiency of Scripture have very strong commitments to the Bible. But they frequently lack proper commitments to general and existential revelation.

b. Underestimate

This error generally appears as an insistence that the Bible is sufficient to guide us only in limited areas of life, that it gives us moral instruction only on certain topics.

3. Silence (1:07:48)

Christians frequently teach that some issues are morally indifferent because Scripture doesn't provide us with sufficient information.

adiaphora: indifferent things (neither right nor wrong in and of themselves)

God blesses some good choices more than he blesses other good choices.

Some theologians use the category of *adiaphora* to cover matters where we cannot determine what choices are good or evil.

We may often feel as though we cannot know which particular choices, thoughts, actions, or attitudes are good and which ones are evil.

- Not because God's word is insufficient
- Not because the Bible takes a neutral stance
- But because we fail to recognize or to understand how to apply the truth that the Bible has disclosed.

IV. Conclusion (1:14:26)

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3. When it comes to making ethical decisions, how do we benefit from understanding the characteristics of Scripture?

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4. What do we mean when we say that Scripture is clear? What implications follow from this truth?

5. Why is Scripture necessary for ethical decision making?

6. How is Scripture sufficient for ethical decision making?

7. How does Scripture help us conform to God's will and character?

Application Questions

1. How has God's word provided you with strength to carry out what you know to be right and good?
2. Read Romans 1:15-16. Why was Paul compelled to preach the gospel in spite of its apparent foolishness in the eyes of some? What implications does this have for our lives today?
3. In what ways are you challenged to obey the breadth of God's word? In what ways have you sought to avoid some aspect of Scripture's moral teaching?
4. How is our obedience to Scripture connected to our love for God? How does obedience flowing from a heart of love for God differ from obedience done from other motivations?
5. God does not reveal all knowledge to us, only some. How does this make you feel?
6. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?