

Making Biblical Decisions

Study Guide

LESSON
FIVE

THE SITUATIONAL
PERSPECTIVE: REVELATION
AND SITUATION



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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)

A proper understanding of situations can:

- help us understand God's revelation
- inform the decisions we make

II. Content of Revelation (5:12)

Types of revelation:

- special
- general
- existential

Revelation communicates content in the form of facts. These facts include everything that God reveals about our situation.

A. Facts (6:56)

God is our ultimate fact, our ultimate ethical environment.

In order for us to know our obligations before God, he must first reveal himself to us.

B. Goals (10:21)

Goals — the expected outcomes of our endeavors

Each type of revelation provides us with goals that we must adopt.

The Holy Spirit moves within us so that we pursue good goals and shun evil ones.

C. Means (15:23)

We must:

- know the facts and goals God has revealed
- find the appropriate means that God has revealed

Scripture teaches us about ethical means by giving us examples to consider:

- negative — examples not to follow

- positive — examples to follow

III. Nature of Revelation (21:33)

We must understand the nature of God's revelation.

- What are the circumstances for which, and within which, God has revealed himself?

- How does understanding these situations help us to make ethical decisions?

Scripture has a practical priority over everything we may think we have found in general and existential revelation.

A. Inspiration (24:18)

Inspiration:

- The Holy Spirit motivated and superintended the writings of the human authors to ensure that everything they contain is true.
- The Holy Spirit kept the human authors free from error, but also preserved their personalities and their intentions in their writings.

Authors of Scripture:

- Holy Spirit
- Human Writers

To understand Scripture rightly, we must learn:

- *Facts* about its authors

- *Goals* of its authors

- *Means* used by its authors

B. Example (30:17)

It is impossible to identify *all* the facts, goals and means of a particular text of Scripture, but the Bible records many examples that can guide us.

1 Corinthians 10:5-11 refers to:

- Exodus 32

- Numbers 25

- Numbers 21

- Numbers 16

Moses wrote the Pentateuch to warn future generations against repeating the failures of the Israelites.

Facts Paul noted:

- God was not pleased

- bodies were scattered

- specific actions displeased God:
 - paganism
 - idolatry
 - testing
 - grumbling

Types of facts Paul noted:

- Details reported in Scripture

- Author's intention

IV. Strategies toward Revelation (36:20)

We are dealing with two situations:

- the situation of Scripture
- our modern situation

We have to find ways to connect the situations of Scripture to our modern world.

A. Laxity (37:25)

A perceived lack of clarity has often led Christians to adopt simple strategies for defining the boundaries of Christian morality.

1. Description (39:02)

Laxity tends toward permissiveness:

- slow to identify and condemn sins in the modern world
- permits what the Bible prohibits
- overlooks what the Bible commands

Christians are predisposed to lax readings of Scripture for at least two reasons:

- Difference — They believe that the situations in the Bible are so different from modern life that the Bible cannot be applied to our day.
- Vagueness — They believe that the situations in the Bible are too vague to be applied to modern life.

2. Consequences (41:47)

Laxity encourages Christians to rationalize many sins:

- lesser of contrasting wrongs
- inappropriate exceptions
- false qualifications
- good motives excuse evil actions

3. Correctives (47:11)

To counter difference — emphasize Bible's similarity to the modern world in the areas of facts, goals, and means.

The situations of Scripture are always sufficiently similar to our own for us to make modern applications

To counter vagueness — emphasize the Bible's clarity.

Scripture is always clear enough for ethical applications to be drawn from it.

B. Rigor (50:52)

1. Description (51:07)

Extreme concern to guard against sin, especially as it is defined in the prohibitions listed in Scripture.

Similarity — views the situations in the Bible as being so similar to our own that the Bible is directly applicable to our lives.

Vagueness — when the Bible appears to be vague, mistakenly believes that the proper response is to apply Scripture in restrictive ways.

2. **Consequences (54:48)**

- Destroys Christian freedom

- Inspires despair

- Hinders attempts to learn our duty

- Hampers ability to take joy in the God of our salvation.

3. Correctives (59:13)

To counter similarity — Our modern situations are sufficiently different from biblical situations.

To counter vagueness — Scripture is always sufficiently clear to communicate God's will with regard to Christian ethics.

C. Human Authority (1:03:26)**1. Description (1:03:42)**

Too strong a tendency to defer to the judgments of other human beings.

Possible reasons why one might choose this way:

- church leaders claim exclusive insight or authority to interpret Scriptures
- belief that own knowledge is insufficient
- lazy

2. Consequences (1:06:41)

- Rejection of the supreme authority of Scripture

- Endorsement of false interpretations

3. Correctives (1:10:11)

Maintain the supremacy of Scripture as our ultimate revealed norm.

Church and its traditions are lesser authorities.

Measure every human judgment against Scripture.

V. Application of Revelation (1:13:50)

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

God's word is sufficient for all our ethical endeavors because it provides us with enough information about God's character to figure out what to do.

A. Facts (1:16:21)

Changes in facts require changes in the application of God's Word.

Three historical periods:

- Exodus
- Promised Land
- Church

Facts:

- Similarities

- Differences

Ethical judgments:

- Similarities

- Differences

Modern applications:

- Similarities

- Differences

Ethical judgments:

- Similarities

- Differences

Modern applications:

- Similarities

- Differences

Every ethical judgment requires us to:

- consider the modern goals in light of the biblical goals
- focus on the similarities and differences between them

Modern applications

- Similarities

- Differences

We can determine which means are appropriate by looking at the correspondence between:

- the situations described in the Bible
- the situations of our own lives

VI. Conclusion (1:36:43)

7. What characterizes an overly lax approach to revelation? What dangers does this strategy present? How can we avoid falling into this strategy?

8. What characterizes an overly rigorous approach to revelation? What dangers does this strategy present? How can we avoid falling into this strategy?

Application Questions

1. Why does God as our ultimate fact, our ultimate ethical environment, obligate us to live by the standard of his character? What happens if we ignore this fact?
2. First Corinthians 10:31 says, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” How can we glorify God in the mundane activities of life (i.e. brushing teeth, making the bed, driving a car, etc.)?
3. Why is it important to interpret the Bible within its historical context? What kinds of ethical mistakes can we make if we fail to interpret the Bible rightly?
4. Provide three real or hypothetical examples of the strategy of laxity. What overall impact might this strategy have on the person or community that has embraced it?
5. Provide three real or hypothetical examples of the strategy of rigor. What overall impact might this strategy have on the person or community that has embraced it?
6. Provide three real or hypothetical examples of the strategy of relying on human authority. What overall impact might this strategy have on the person or community that has embraced it?
7. Which popular strategy or strategies toward revelation most reflect your own practice? What practical steps can you take to correct these inclinations?
8. How does an understanding of the Scriptures as the supreme revealed authority keep us from falling into a strategy of laxity, rigor, or human authority?
9. We all make many ethical decisions every day. How might you use the insights of this lesson to help you make better decisions in the future?
10. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?