

# Making Biblical Decisions

Lesson 1

Ethics in Scripture

Lesson Guide



**thirdmill**

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Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

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Thirdmill is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org).

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## HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

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

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- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments 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 lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment 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 (0:20)

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

### II. Definition (1:25)

"Ethics" is concerned with moral right and wrong; the study of what is good and what is evil.

"*Christian ethics*" is theology viewed as a means of determining which persons, acts and attitudes receive God's blessing and which do not.

#### A. God and His Blessings (3:06)

Those things that receive God's blessing are good and right, whereas those that do not are wrong and evil.

##### 1. Divine Nature (4:09)

God is not accountable to any standard outside himself:

- everything that accords with his character is good and right
- everything that does not is evil and wrong.

The metaphor of God as light depicts God as perfectly free from sin in his very nature (1 John 1:5-7).

## **2. Actions (7:03)**

God shows approval for right and good by bestowing blessings, and hatred for wrong and evil by pouring out curses (Leviticus 26:3; 26:14-16).

The Bible often communicates right and wrong by recording God's reactions rather than by explicitly labeling things good or evil.

## **B. Breadth of Issues (11:12)**

Christian ethics touches every dimension of the Christian life.

“Theology” is the application of the Word of God to all of life.

Nothing stands outside of God's moral standards (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV).

### C. **Depth of Issues (14:08)**

The Bible teaches Christians to conform every aspect of our lives and beings to God's moral standards (Matthew 5:22, 28; 7:21-23).

It is not enough that our actions and attitudes be morally good; we must be intrinsically good persons with good natures (Romans 8:5-9).

- Unbelievers natures, actions and attitudes are evil.
- Believers are indwelled by the Holy Spirit and have new natures

Scope of Christian ethics:

- God is the standard of ethics.
- All theology, even all of life, has ethical dimensions.
- God's moral standards hold us accountable in our actions, our hearts, and our natures.

### III. **Threefold Criteria (20:47)**

Unbelievers can do things that resemble our definition of ethical living, actions that bring about the blessing of God (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 16.7).

Even unbelievers may do things that God commands and benefit from them (Matthew 7:9-11).

Apparently virtuous actions that unbelievers perform are “sinful” and “cannot please God” or make someone worthy of grace from God.

**A. Proper Motive (25:33)**

**1. Faith (26:19)**

Only believers have hearts that are purified by faith:

- God-given
- the means of purification through which believers receive new and good natures
- motivates believers to do good works (James 2:14-17).

Without the motive of faith, we cannot do good works (Hebrews 11:6, Romans 14:23).

**2. Love (31:00)**

Our works are useless if they are not motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).



Jesus taught that the Law and the Old Testament require above all else that we love the Lord and our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40).

**B. Proper Standard (33:39)**

In order for works to be good, they must be done according to the standard of the Word of God (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 16.7).

**1. Commands (34:33)**

Every sin amounts to lawlessness — a rejection of God's commands (1 John 3:4).

To violate *any* command is to violate the entire ethical system of Scripture (James 2:9-10).

God's Word is always our binding ethical norm — all good works must conform to his commands in Scripture.

**2. All Scripture (39:27)**

Good works must be done according to the teaching of *all* of God's revelation (Exodus 20:9-11; Matthew 12:3-4).

Our actions must conform to the standards of *all* of Scripture if they are to be morally good (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV).

### 3. **General Revelation (42:35)**

Despite what people know about God's moral standards through general revelation, they prefer to sin (Romans 1:20).

General revelation is part of God's word, and part of the criterion to which good works must conform.

### C. **Proper Goal (44:55)**

God's glory is to be a central, foundational goal in our lives (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Everything in the Christian life should be done in a way that honors God and brings him glory (1 Peter 4:11).

God rewards and approves only those works that have his glory as their ultimate goal. (Romans 11:36).

**IV. Threefold Process (50:18)****A. Tendencies (50:52)**

Three tendencies of believers when trying to make ethical choices in life:

- Scripture (proper standard)
- Consequences (proper goal)
- Conscience (proper motive)

**B. Perspectives (53:31)**

“Ethical judgment” involves the application of *God’s Word* to a *situation* by a *person*.

Moral decisions can be made properly only when all three perspectives are taken equally into account:

- God’s Word (normative perspective)
- the situation (situational perspective)
- the person (existential perspective)

## 1. **Situational (56:13)**

Scripture appeals to God's sovereign, providential control of his creation to instruct us:

- Romans 6:2-4: focuses on the situation (the events of redemption and the ends for which we were saved)
- Romans 6:20-22: live holy, moral lives, and abstain from the sin
- 1 Peter 2:21: be willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness

## 2. **Normative (1:00:29)**

God's word is the norm or standard for ethics:

- 2 Kings 23:21: appeals to the words of the Law that God had delivered to his people through Moses
- 1 John 3:23: God's commandment is the basis for belief and behavior

### 3. **Existential (1:02:14)**

Ethics viewed through the individual person's experience:

- 1 John 3:21: as redeemed people, our hearts are in tune with God's character
- Galatians 5:16: believers can perform good deeds by obeying the inward leading of the Holy Spirit
- Romans 14:5, 14, 23: to violate our consciences is sin even though our consciences are not perfect

### C. **Interdependence (1:08:03)**

Evaluations of ethical questions from the situational perspective must always include personal and normative considerations.

If we cannot apply the words of Scripture to our situations, and if they do not affect us on a personal level, we really have not understood Scripture.

We cannot rightly understand the self unless we see it in the context of its situation and rightly interpret it by the Word of God.

### V. **Conclusion (1:12:40)**





5. Why must our works be done according to the proper standard, and what is the proper standard for ethics?

6. Why must our works have a proper goal, and what should our goal be?







11. Summarize the biblical model for making ethical decisions.

## Application Questions

1. Compare an ethical system based on God himself as the ultimate standard with an ethical system in which God is not the ultimate standard. How are they similar? How are they different?
2. Why should we think of application as part of theology? What dangers exist when we do not include application in our definition of theology?
3. Explain the idea that all feelings have moral consequences. Which biblical passages make this point most clearly?
4. Describe the most important difference between the similar actions of an unbeliever and a believer.
5. Why are faith and love the criteria for proper motives? What do these criteria reveal about what God values?
6. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What are some benefits to using *all* of Scripture for ethical training?
7. Which perspective do you most frequently rely upon in your decision making? What advantages and disadvantages does this preference offer you in your ethical decisions?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

## Glossary

**Christian ethics** – Theology viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not

**covenant** – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people

**ethical judgment** – The application of God’s Word to a situation by a person

**ethics** – The study of moral right and wrong; the study of what is good and what is evil

**existential** – Of or relating to existence and being

**existential perspective** – Ethical perspective that considers the person, the motives, and the inner leading of the Holy Spirit; one of the three perspectives on human knowledge used by theologian John Frame in his Tri-Perspectivalism; concerned with the response of the believing heart through emotion and feeling

**general revelation** – God’s use of the natural world and its workings to make his existence, nature, presence, actions and will known to all humanity

**normative perspective** – Ethical perspective that looks to God’s Word as the norm or standard for making ethical decisions

**Passover** – Jewish festival remembering when God delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt

**relativism** – A philosophical view that treats moral judgments as a matter of personal opinion relative to the changing norms of one’s culture, society or historical context without adhering to an absolute standard of right and wrong

**Sabbath** – Day of rest commanded by God in the Old Testament; *Shabbat* in Hebrew

**situational perspective** – Approach to ethics with an emphasis on the situation and how the details of our circumstances relate to our ethical decisions

**special revelation** – God’s disclosures of himself and his will to a select number of people through dreams, visions, prophets, the Scriptures, and other similar means

**teleological** – Of or relating to the purpose or goal of something; concerned with outcomes as the basis for an action being considered good

**theology** – Any matter that refers directly to God or that describes subjects in relation to God

**Westminster Confession of Faith** – An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647