

# Making Biblical Decisions

## Lesson 3

The Normative Perspective:  
The Attributes of Scripture

Lesson Guide



**thirdmill**

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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. Divine Authorship (3:24)

Biblical authors were inspired by God and authorized by him to deliver his message.

#### A. Power of Scripture (4:20)

Scripture empowers us to believe and to live in ways that please God and lead to his blessings.

##### 1. Examples (5:34)

- Over creation

God spoke the world into existence (Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6, 9).

God used his declarations as vessels to transmit his power.

- Prophets

God's word has power when it comes through the mouths of inspired prophets (Isaiah 55:10-11).

- Preaching

Preaching the gospel carries God's power (Romans 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 1:18).

- Scripture

Jesus himself pointed to the power of God's written word (Luke 16:29-31).

- Moses and the Prophets were authors who continued to speak through the Bible.
- Scripture has as much power to bring people to repentance as seeing someone raised from the dead.

Scripture is a means through which God gives people the understanding and faith necessary for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15).

## 2. **Implications (15:01)**

God's word is "living and active"; not a mere collection of inert information that has no potency (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Scripture has the power to equip us "for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

God's written word actually empowers us to live for God.

**B. Authority of Scripture (18:35)**

God has all authority; therefore, whenever and however he speaks, all who hear him are obligated to obey him.

**1. Claim of Authority (19:32)**

• **Historical Examples (20:41)**

God spoke directly to humanity, and his speech carried authority (Genesis 2, 3):

- God commanded man to cultivate the Garden of Eden and not to eat the forbidden fruit.
- Eve listened to the spoken word of the serpent rejected the authority of God's word.
- Adam listened to Eve's spoken word and rejected God's authority.
- God enforced his word's authority by punishing Adam and Eve, and all creation.

God encoded his spoken word in written form through Moses (Exodus 24):

- carved the Ten Commandments on stone tablets
  
- gave Moses many other laws and the Book of the Covenant

God's spoken word is the basis for his written word — his authoritative covenant document that his people are obligated to obey (Exodus 24:4-8).

Just as God's spoken word is authoritative revelation, so is his written word:

- Isaiah 42:24 – Israel violated God's law, the written the covenant between God and his people.
  
- John 17:12 – Jesus' protection of the eleven and the loss of Judas Iscariot were done in accordance with Scripture.
  
- Romans 12:19 – Paul appealed to the Scriptures as proof that Christians should not be vengeful.



- **Explicit claims (26:25)**

The Old Testament prophetic writings continue to be authoritative in our day (2 Peter 1:19-21):

- inspired and authorized by God
- form a binding moral standard

The Old Testament is still God's authoritative word (James 2:10-11).

The apostles used the authority Jesus gave them in writing the documents that are the New Testament (John 13:20).

Paul issued a direct written command that carried his delegated authority from Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

## **2. Implications (31:21)**

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

- **Breadth (31:53)**

God equated keeping all his decrees with doing what is right (Exodus 15:26).

God explicitly defined “what is right” as whatever he commands (1 Kings 11:38).

God calls his people to observe the authority of all of his word without exception, including us in our own day.

- **Depth (35:01)**

Our obedience rests on the fact that God has called us in love and authority to be his willing servants (Deuteronomy 7:9, 11).

Because God has called us into a loving relationship with himself, we are obligated to obey his commands (John 14:15, 21; John 14:31).

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

### III. Human Audience (38:13)

#### A. Clarity (39:00)

Scripture is clear — not obscure or filled with hidden meanings.

##### 1. Nature (39:50)

The clarity of Scripture includes “all things in Scripture” and “those things which are necessary ... for salvation” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1, section 7):

- The gospel

Scripture speaks plainly about the gospel.

But we have to make “due use of the ordinary means” if we expect to take advantage of the Bible’s clarity.

The gospel is made clear “in some place of Scripture or other.”

The Bible does present the way of salvation with enough clarity that it can be learned directly from Scripture.

- “All things in Scripture”

God gave us Scripture in order that we might understand the things he revealed in Scripture and apply them (Deuteronomy 29:29).

## **2. Implications (45:25)**

All Scripture is clear enough to be useful if we apply ourselves to study it diligently (2 Peter 3:16).

- Some portions of Scripture are quite a bit less clear than others.
- Some people have a greater ability than others to understand the words of Scripture.

## **B. Necessity (47:18)**

### **1. Salvation (47:30)**

Only Scripture provides sufficient information to secure salvation (Romans 10:13-17).

The gospel message is the normal means by which God delivers faith to individuals (preaching and Scripture).

Gospel proclamation is closely associated with the written word of Scripture:

- God often delivered his messages directly to prophets who spoke God's word to the people and insured that the prophetic word was written down (Old Testament).
- The apostles learned the gospel directly from Jesus, then delivered it through preaching and through their writings (New Testament).

Humans come to faith and salvation, either through their own reading of the Bible or through preaching based on the Bible.

Only Scripture is absolutely, unfailingly, unquestionably reliable and the basis and criterion for the preaching of the gospel.

## **2. Faithful Living (53:04)**

Sin has corrupted nature and humankind, making it difficult to know how to interpret general and existential revelation.

Our ethical determinations based on Scripture are more secure and more reliable than those based on other forms of revelation (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1, section 10).

### 3. Implications (55:14)

We simply cannot be moral without attending to the teaching of Scripture.

Without Scripture, salvation is not possible, and therefore, morality is not possible.

The need for Scripture beyond general and existential revelation can be seen in the controversy that arose in the early church (Acts 15).

- Some argued that Gentile converts should observe the law of Moses (circumcision, sacrifices).
- Paul and Barnabas argued that God did not expect Gentiles to live as first-century Jews.
- James, the brother of Jesus, appealed to Scripture — Amos 9:11, 12 — to address this disagreement.

To answer the moral questions raised in Acts 15, it was necessary to use Scripture to interpret general and existential revelation.

**C. Sufficiency (59:22)**

The “sufficiency of Scripture” is the ability to fulfill the purpose for which Scripture was written.

**1. Purpose (99:56)**

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches that the Bible was written to teach us:

- to glorify God (Deuteronomy 28:58-59)

If we fail to revere and glorify God, it’s because human beings have failed to make proper use of Scripture.

- to bring men and women to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

Paul instructed Timothy to remain steadfast in his study of Scripture due to the sufficiency of Scripture for *salvation*.

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

- to instruct believers regarding the content of their faith (2 Timothy 3:15)

Saving faith, revealed in the Bible, is the means through which we are justified and receive our salvation from God.

- to guide us in Christian living (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

If we rightly understand the Bible, we'll know God's standards sufficiently to make proper determinations about ethical issues, and to apply them to any situation.

There are things “expressly set down in Scripture” and things that must be deduced by way of “good and necessary consequence.”

The sufficiency of Scripture affirms that “nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

When human norms conflict with biblical norms we must always go against them (Matthew 21:12-13).

Jesus understood the biblical norm that the temple was to be dedicated to prayer (Isaiah 56:7) but the Jewish leadership made it “a den of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:11).



Following any human law or tradition is sinful when the human norm contradicts Scripture.

## 2. **Misunderstandings (1:11:05)**

- **Overestimate (1:11:17)**

- have very strong commitments to the Bible
- lack proper commitments to general and existential revelation
- believe that making ethical decisions is as simple as reading the Bible and obeying it

- **Underestimate (1:12:36)**

- insist that the Bible is sufficient to guide us only in limited areas of life
- believe it gives us moral instruction only on certain topics (e.g., Thomas Aquinas)
- argue that the Bible does not address serious social matters (gay marriage, abortion, euthanasia).

Scripture provides us with a comprehensive system of ethical norms.

### 3. Silent (1:14:16)

Christians frequently teach that the Bible doesn't provide us with sufficient information to know God's will on some matters (i.e., *adiaphora*).

This position actually runs contrary to the teachings of Scripture:

- 1 Timothy 4:4-5 – Paul insisted that everything was good.
- 1 Corinthians 7:38 – God blesses some good choices more than other good choices.

Scripture is not really “indifferent,” even when we have to choose between good options.

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

Nothing and no one is indifferent or neutral — either God blesses or he does not.

There are some words, thoughts and deeds that are good in some situations but evil in others.

Scripture touches on every aspect of life, at least indirectly.

Christians often have difficulty discerning how the Scriptures direct their thoughts and actions.

Scripture addresses every person and every situation either directly or indirectly.

When we find it difficult to see how the Scriptures address an ethical choice, we must:

- be humble and do the best we can at the moment
- be ready to correct our decisions by continuing to study Scripture, our supreme and sufficient authority
- devote ourselves to understanding our circumstances better, to gaining wisdom from other believers, and to seeking the Lord's help through prayer

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

We must act on a proper understanding of our moral standard (normative), our goals (situational), and our motives (existential).

#### **IV. Conclusion (1:23:23)**





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?

## Glossary

**adiaphora** – Greek word (transliteration) meaning "morally indifferent"; refers to things that are neither forbidden nor commanded in Scripture

**Aquinas, Thomas** – (ca. 1225-1274) Italian theologian and Dominican friar who wrote *Summa Theologica*

**Book of the Covenant** – A collection of laws found in Exodus 20:18–23:33 that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai

**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 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

**existential revelation** – God's revelation through human persons

**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

**perspicuity** – Term meaning "clarity"; in theology, used to describe the fact that the Scriptures can be understood

**revelation** – God's communication of truth to man

**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

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