

Making Biblical Decisions

Lesson 8

The Existential Perspective:
Being Good

Lesson Guide



thirdmill

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ABOUT THIRDMILL

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Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

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.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing award-winning multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our writers and editors are theologically trained educators, our translators are theologically astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world. In addition, our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards using state-of-the-art equipment and techniques.

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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.

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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.

- **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. Creation (3:58)

A. God (4:40)

1. Being (5:34)

God exists in three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — each shares fully in all the essential attributes of his being.

- “God Almighty” – Ezekiel 10:5
- “the God of Justice” – Malachi 2:17
- “the Holy One” – Proverbs 9:10
- “King of Glory” – Psalm 24:7-10

The writers of Scripture revealed who God is, the eternal qualities of his being (e.g., “King of Glory,” Psalm 24).

All of God's essential attributes are immutable — they can never change (Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6).

The “essence” or being of our triune God today is the same as it was before the creation of the world (James 1:17).

2. **Goodness (9:21)**

God's goodness is his moral purity and perfection.

Whatever conforms to his character is good and right; whatever does not conform to his character is evil and wrong.

God is perfectly free from sin in every aspect of his being (1 John 1:5-7).

Three perspectives in ethics:

- normative
- situational
- existential

Each of God's attributes is dependent on the others and qualified by the others.

Theologians refer to this interrelatedness of God's attributes as God's "simplicity" — he is a unified being of absolute integrity.

His attributes always agree because they always describe the same consistent, unified person.

B. Humanity (13:56)

God created the heavens and the earth, shaping them to give them form (Genesis 1).

The pinnacle of the creative week was the creation of humanity on the sixth day (Genesis 1:27-28).

1. Image of God (15:08)

We can understand the image of God in humanity (Genesis 1:27) by noting how the ancient world conceived of images.

Kings commonly erected statues and images of themselves in their kingdoms to remind the people to love, honor and obey them.

God, the great king over all creation, appointed human beings to be his living images.

Killing amounts to assaulting the image of God (Genesis 9:6).

Many ancient kings, who were believed to be royal priests of their gods, were called “sons” of their gods.

God created the human race in his image, as his sons and daughters to represent him in the world.

God created us with qualities that reflected his own perfections.

2. **Blessing (20:26)**

When humanity was created, “God blessed them” (Genesis 1:28).

“Christian ethics” – theology viewed as a means of determining which persons, acts and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not

Whatever God blesses and approves is good, and whatever God curses and condemns is evil.

God's blessing was not an affirmation of their behavior, but of their being — their innate attribute of goodness.

3. **Cultural Mandate (21:55)**

God appointed humanity to be his vassal kings on the earth — to fill, subdue and rule it for his glory (Genesis 1:28).

Humanity was not only *physically* capable of accomplishing this task, but *morally* capable as well.

We were able to choose and to act in morally good ways.

III. **Fall (23:58)**

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden with one prohibition: not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3).

He cursed Adam and Eve because of their sin with severe consequences that applied not only to them, but also to the entire human race.

A. Nature (25:11)

“Nature” of human beings – our fundamental character; the central aspects of our being

After the Fall, the fundamental character of the human race was no longer morally good but morally evil.

Adam’s one sin resulted in the fall of all human beings into sin (Romans 5:12, 8:5-8).

B. Will (28:37)

Human “will” – our personal faculty for deciding, choosing, desiring, hoping, and intending

Our will reflects our nature.

One consequence of the Fall was that our wills were corrupted, making it impossible for us to want to please God (Romans 6–8).

Sin controls fallen human beings, making it impossible for us to submit to God’s law, or to do anything that pleases him (Romans 8:5-8).

We're incapable of doing anything that honors and glorifies God.

There's a sense in which unregenerate people do things that are good (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 16, section 7).

Most people do at least some things that are outwardly good, such as loving and providing for their children (Matthew 7:9-11).

These actions cannot please God — they do not meet the requirements for righteousness (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 16, section 7):

- works that God commands
- of good use to ourselves and to others
- proceed from a heart that is purified by faith
- done in a right manner
- done for the right end — the glory of God

This approach reflects the three perspectives in ethics:

- normative perspective – good works are those that “God commands”
- situational perspective – “good use,” “right manner,” and “right end”
- existential perspective – a “heart purified by faith”

Unregenerate people can still make choices that look good on the surface, but these choices are never *truly* good.

C. **Knowledge (35:53)**

Fallen and unredeemed human beings possess *some* true knowledge, the cannot obtain a *proper* knowledge of God's commands.

1. **Access to Revelation (37:41)**

The Fall limited the Holy Spirit's work of illumination and inward leading — God withheld these divine gifts.

“Illumination” – a divine gift of knowledge or understanding that is primarily cognitive (e.g., Matthew 16:17)

“Inward leading” – a divine gift of knowledge or understanding that is primarily emotive or intuitive

God provides a measure illumination and inward leading to all human beings:

- Unbelievers have an instinctive knowledge of God's law.
- Unbelievers are often convicted by their consciences when they commit certain sins.

God has chosen to reveal himself in ways that bless those who love him and that curse those who hate him.

Jesus made himself known to believers in order to build love and unity between the Lord and his people (John 17:26).

2. Understanding of Revelation (40:53)

The Fall profoundly reduced our ability to make sense of God's revelation.

Our ethical judgments are not detached assessments of facts.

Fallen human beings can receive God's revelation but their hearts are hardened against God and his truth (Matthew 13:13-15).

The Fall resulted in the hardening of our hearts — keeps us from properly understanding God's revelation (Ephesians 4:17-18).

Instead of accepting true knowledge from God, we delude ourselves into believing the lies that our sinful hearts invent.

3. Obedience to Revelation (44:49)

- **Reciprocal (45:38)**

Knowledge of God produces obedience — given for the purpose of producing life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Obedience is a prerequisite for knowledge — leads to knowledge of him (Proverbs 1:7, 15:33).

The Fall has corrupted our nature and will so that we rebel against God and are incapable of submitting to his word.

- **Inseparable (48:14)**

The concepts of knowledge and obedience are inseparable Scripture:

- synonymous with each other

Hosea 6:6 – sacrifice synonymous with burnt offerings; loyalty (or obedience) synonymous with knowledge of God

- define each other

Jeremiah 22:16 – knowledge of God defined in terms of obedience: preserving justice for the poor and needy.

- examples of the other

Hosea 4:1 – knowledge is part of obedience; we have an ethical responsibility to know the Lord.

No fallen human being can think, say or do anything that is morally good.

IV. Redemption (53:05)

This period began immediately after the Fall, when God extended mercy to Adam and Eve (*proto-euangelion* – “first gospel”).

Redemption won't be completed until Jesus returns in glory.

A. Nature (54:23)

Human “nature” – our fundamental character; the central aspects of our being

Once we're redeemed in Christ, our nature is renewed by the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 6:6-11):

- regenerates us
- gives us a good nature
- restores our moral ability

God recreates us, giving us new hearts and spirits that are righteous rather than sinful, though we are not perfect like he is (Mark 10:18).

B. Will (58:23)

Human “will” – our personal faculty for deciding, choosing, desiring, hoping, and intending

When we come to faith in Christ, sin’s hold over our will is broken — we’re no longer forced to desire and choose sin (Ezekiel 36:27; Philippians 2:12-13).

Our redemption does not fully remove sin in from lives but we are no longer enslaved by it, though it can still be very hard to resist (Romans 7:21-23).

In our redemption, the Holy Spirit indwells us to strengthen and motivate us against sin.

When Jesus completes our redemption, we will be free from sin’s indwelling presence, and never choose sin again.

C. Knowledge (1:02:48)**1. Access to Revelation (1:02:58)**

Our redemption gives us greater access to the illumination and inward leading of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27; Ephesians 1:17):

- convinces us of the truth of the gospel
- makes our consciences sensitive to God's character
- gives us godly intuitions

2. Understanding of Revelation (1:04:43)

The Holy Spirit changes our hearts, so that we love God, and renews our minds to grasp the truths that God reveals (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

The Holy Spirit guards our hearts and our minds, destroying sin's ability to deceive us, and empowering us to understand revelation.

No believer has a perfect understanding of God's revelation (Colossians 1:9).

We need the constant ministry of the Holy Spirit so that our own understanding can increase.

3. Obedience to Revelation (1:08:11)

- **Causal (1:08:32)**

Redemption produces obedience in the lives of believers.

Fallen humanity hates God and cannot obey him but redeemed humanity loves God and obeys him (1 John 2:3-6).

John the Baptist demanded that his followers produce “fruit” in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8).

The Holy Spirit produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

- **Inseparable (1:12:14)**

No one can be obedient to God without being redeemed; no one can be redeemed without being obedient to God.

- 1 Peter 1:22-23 – Conversion to Christ is itself an act of obedience.
- Hebrews 5:9 – If the Spirit of Christ indwells you, he will continue to produce obedience in your life.

Redemption produces obedience to God, and obedience to God produces knowledge of God and his ways.

Knowledge of God includes cognitive aspects, as well as experiential and relational (Psalm 36:10; Daniel 11:32; John 17:3).

In our redemption we obtain the ability to perform good works — to say, think, and do things that God blesses.

V. Conclusion (1:15:57)

3. How and in what way has human nature been affected by the Fall?

4. In what ways has the human will been affected by the Fall?

Application Questions

1. How can Christians find comfort in the fact that God's attributes are immutable? What comfort is to be found with the knowledge that God's attributes never conflict?
2. In what ways does the concept of the image of God as royal children dignify humanity?
3. How can a morally evil person who is living under the curse make seemingly morally good decisions (i.e. truthful, helpful, kind, etc.)?
4. The Fall corrupts human nature, enslaves the will, and severely damages our knowledge of God's revelation. What impact does this have on our efforts to evangelize the world? How should it inform our evangelism strategies?
5. Explain from your own life how knowledge of God has led to obedience.
6. In what ways have you seen your obedience to God's standard result in a more intimate knowledge of him?
7. In Christ, we have become capable of true goodness again, but we still struggle with sin. What strategies have you found helpful in resisting sin? What strategies have you found unhelpful in resisting sin?
8. In what ways do you see your church community loving God and obeying him? In what ways are you loving God and obeying him? Explain the connection between this love and obedience.
9. Why should the return of Jesus and the full application of his redeeming work bring Christians hope?
10. 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

cultural mandate – The command in Genesis 1:28 instructing humanity to develop and rule the creation to display God’s glory

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

human nature – One’s fundamental character or the central aspects of one’s being

human will – A person’s faculty for deciding, choosing, desiring, hoping, intending and making decisions

illumination – Divine gift of knowledge or understanding, primarily cognitive, attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit

inward leading – Divine gift of knowledge or understanding, primarily emotive or intuitive, attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit

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

proto-euangelion – Theological term for "first gospel" or the first promise of redemption found in Genesis 3:15

revelation – God’s communication of truth to man

revelation – God’s communication of truth to man

simplicity of God – Theological term used to explain that God’s essence is not a composite of different substances, but a unified whole consisting of only one substance

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

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