

Making Biblical Decisions

Lesson 7

The Situational Perspective:
Understanding the Facts

Lesson Guide



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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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. God (3:02)

A. Authority (4:18)

1. Absolute (5:12)

God's absolute authority means he has complete and total freedom over what he has created (e.g., potter with clay):

- Isaiah 29:16
- Isaiah 45:9
- Jeremiah 18:1-10
- Romans 9:18-24

God has the freedom and right to do whatever he wants with what he creates (Romans 9:20-21).

When God reveals his ethical judgments, they are true and never subject to scrutiny.

God's authority in ethics is absolute.

2. Exclusive (8:17)

God's exclusive authority means that only God possesses absolute authority.

All other types of authority are delegated by God — his authority is always superior to creaturely authority.

Our ethical decisions be made in ultimate submission to God.

3. Exhaustive (9:29)

God's exhaustive authority means that it extends over everything he has created, in every detail:

- *All* creatures are under God's authority.

- Not one aspect of creation is morally neutral.

B. Control (10:54)**1. Sovereign (11:26)**

Christians have always affirmed the biblical teaching that God has an unlimited ability and right to control the creation.

Some argue that God's sovereign control over his creation is incompatible with the idea of human moral responsibility.

They have wrongly believed that either God is sovereign, *or* we are responsible but not both (open theism):

- For God to hold human beings responsible, we must have ultimate control over our lives.
- If God has sovereign control over the universe, then he has no right to hold us responsible for what we do.
- God has either limited his sovereignty voluntarily or is, by his very nature, unable to control the entire creation.
- God does not know what will happen:
 - only limited influence over things that happen in creation
 - often frustrated by the way that history unfolds

Scriptures teaches that God's sovereign control is completely compatible with human responsibility:

- God has an all-encompassing plan for his creation, and that he controls creation in order to carry out this plan.
 - Hebrews 6:17 – his unchanging purpose
 - Matthew 13:35; Ephesians 1:4 – plans he made before the foundation of the world
 - Romans 8:28 – the plan by which he controls all creation
 - Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29 – his appointment of people and events

- God's sovereign control as the *basis* for ethical responsibility.
 - Philippians 2:12-13 – works in believers, causing them “to will and to work” according to his sovereign plan.

2. Moral (17:31)

God provides the means and the opportunity to avoid sin (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God does not allow us to be presented with situations in which all our options are sinful.

God's control is moral — he orders creation so that our circumstances never excuse our unethical choices.

C. Presence (19:38)

1. Covenant King (19:53)

God created Adam and Eve as his vassal, priestly kings, to spread God's kingdom throughout the earth.

After the Fall, God remained present with the human race as our covenant king.

God's presence in Scripture:

- visible manifestations (pillar of fire, pillar of cloud – Exodus 13:21, 22)
- miracles (parting of the Red Sea – Exodus 14)
- with certain individuals (Elijah – 2 Kings 1:9-12)
- Israel's covenant king and ours today (Matthew 5:34, 35)

God sees everything because God is present everywhere and he judges us on the basis of what he sees (Hebrews 4:13).

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

2. **Incarnate Lord (24:07)**

In Jesus, God became present with us in a new, physical way.

Ethical results of the incarnation:

- forgiveness of sins – make it possible for God to bless us for our good works (Hebrews 2:17).
- firsthand sympathy – Jesus gained sympathy for us in the midst of the temptations we face (Hebrews 2:18).
- pattern of righteousness – provides us with the supreme pattern for all human life.
- moral victory – enabled us to prevail in moral battles, and he ensured our ultimate victory.

3. **Ministering Spirit (27:10)**

Ministry of the Holy Spirit:

- Indwelling
 - regenerates individual believers enables and motivates us to make ethical decisions (Romans 8:9-10)
 - gives us moral ability to do good works
 - changes our hearts and minds so that we love God and desire his blessings

- Gifting
 - Old Testament – gifting only to special individuals (prophets, priests and kings)
 - Joel – prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all believers, gifting everyone he indwelled (Acts 2:16-17, Pentecost).
 - Every believer in the church has been spiritually gifted (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4)

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to build up the church; our moral duty is to use them for the good of God's people (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).

III. Creation (33:27)

Three realms of creation:

- supernatural realm (above nature) – God and his works
- natural realm (nature, Genesis 1) – where we live and operate
- preternatural realm (beyond nature) – habitation of invisible spirits such as angels and demons

A. Preternatural (34:56)

1. Inhabitants (36:23)

God populated the universe with angels and demons — intelligent, rational spiritual beings that have wills and personalities.

All were created as angels, serving God but some angels willfully rebelled against him and fell into condemnation.

Both angels and demons have influence over many things that happen in the natural world.

- **Angels (38:45)**

Serve as God's loyal messengers and agents:

- communicate his word to human beings
- interact with humanity on God's behalf (2 Kings 19:35)
- work in some mundane ways (Psalm 91:11, 12)

God's angels are constantly working to ensure that we have an opportunity to behave morally (Hebrews 1:14).

God is using our salvation to teach wisdom to angels (Ephesians 3:10).

- **Demons (41:27)**

Demons are able to interact with the natural realm:

- tempt believers into idolatry
- destroyed Job's possessions and health and killed his family (Job 1, 2)

Demons constantly tempt us, trying to lead us away from moral choices.

2. Spiritual Warfare (43:17)

Satan and the demons are locked in battle against God's holy angels — spiritual warfare.

Our enemies include the demonic rulers, authorities, powers and forces in the preternatural world (Ephesians 6:12).

Jesus has crippled the demons' ability to overtake us (Colossians 2:15).

Demons will continue to attack us until God judges them on the last day.

B. Natural (45:54)

1. Creation (46:07)

Human beings are of central importance in the natural realm (Genesis 1).

We are part of nature, we have an ethical obligation to protect it (Genesis 2:7).

We are to promote life and growth, turning the world into a kingdom that is fit for God to inhabit (Genesis 1:28).

2. **Fall (47:54)**

God responded to the Fall by cursing both the human race and the earth, subjecting them to corruption (Genesis 3:17-19).

Nature is both the recipient of God's cursing and the instrument of God's cursing.

The natural world has not been *completely* corrupted by the Fall.

Nature is still good, and a means God uses to minister to us and bless us (Psalm 19:1; 1 Timothy 4:4-5).

3. **Redemption (51:17)**

The effects of the curse are reversed in the natural realm:

- instrument of redemption – God is controlling everything in the natural realm to our benefit, furthering our redemption (Romans 8:28).

- recipient of redemption – God will create a new heaven and new earth (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).

Earth will eventually be brought to the glorious destiny that God ordained for it from the beginning (Romans 8:19, 21).

IV. Humanity (56:46)

A. Society (57:02)

1. Solidarity (57:25)

- **Corporate task (58:32)**

“Cultural mandate” – God’s command that human beings expand his kingdom to the ends of the earth through the development of human culture (Genesis 1:28).

God intended humans to corporately fulfill this mandate — all human beings have solidarity with each other.

The cultural mandate obligates humanity as a whole to reproduce and to build cultures.

God has intended human beings to take other people into account when we make individual decisions.

- **Corporate failure (1:01:04)**

God assigned Adam and Eve individual roles to fulfill the cultural mandate.

The Fall corrupted Adam and Eve as individuals, as well as the God-ordained family structure.

We must be ethically pure as individuals, and promote the morality of other individuals.

- **Corporate consequences (1:02:32)**

When God created Adam and Eve, he entered into a covenant with them.

Every human being who has ever existed, or ever will exist, was included in this covenant.

Our corporate solidarity with Adam condemned every individual of the human race to the covenant curses (Romans 5:18).

Every human, other than Jesus, fell under the covenant curses when Adam sinned:

- born under God's curse of death; destined to eternal judgment
- born corrupt; incapable of doing anything good (Romans 8:7-8)

As consequence of our corporate condition, we do not fulfill the cultural mandate in the way God intended.

- **Corporate reconstitution (1:07:05)**

God's plan for creation is to build a kingdom (1 Peter 2:9).

God is redeeming individuals and placing them in redeemed *societies*.

When Jesus returns in the future, corporate social structures will be completely redeemed as well.

2. **Commonality (1:09:06)**

Humans are part of many smaller groups of people (nations, cultures, sub-cultures, churches, families).

Within each of these social groups, there are fundamental similarities that bind the group together.

It is important that we adapt our behavior to the shared experiences of the people around us (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

3. **Community (1:11:33)**

- **Impact (1:12:29)**

The decisions and actions of individuals often impact others around them.

Christians must treat one another with honor and respect, because what happens to one Christian affects every believer (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).

We must make decisions that benefit others and not hurt them, and will encourage them to behave in ethical ways (1 Corinthians 8:13).

- **Responsibilities (1:15:09)**

We have a responsibility to love one another in the same way that Jesus loved us (1 John 3:11-18).

This is a responsibility that must be reflected in all our ethical decisions.

B. Individuals (1:16:38)

1. Character (1:17:26)

Our character influences our ability and inclination to make decisions that honor God.

2. Experiences (1:19:06)

Our experiences might include such things as our heritage, our education, our opportunities, our status and position.

These experiences partially determine our moral responsibilities.

We need to recognize that each one of us fights a unique spiritual battle.

Each experience presents us with responsibilities that are in some ways unique to us.

3. Body (1:21:35)

The facts related to our bodies come into play in ethical situations.

Our ethical obligations are partially determined by our physical maturity and our intellectual abilities (Deuteronomy 1:35-39).

God does not overlook the sins we commit as a result of sin residing in our bodies (Romans 7:18-24).

Even when our bodies make it easy and natural for us to sin, they do not excuse us from sins that the Bible clearly condemns.

4. Roles (1:25:43)

Every person has multiple roles in life.

God has spiritually gifted each believer in different ways and he expects us to use our gifts to minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Each of these roles presents us with particular temptations and responsibilities.

Able-bodied adults, especially husbands and fathers, must work to support themselves and their families (1 Timothy 5:8).

Each role is an important and complex fact in our ethical situation.

V. Conclusion (1:28:20)

Review Questions

1. Describe God's authority over creation.
2. Describe God's control over creation.

9. Explain the importance of human individuality to ethical decisions in terms of character, experiences, body, and roles.

Application Questions

1. What are some typical excuses people use to avoid submitting to what God has clearly commanded? Why do we make such excuses?
2. How would you explain to a friend that God orders creation in such a way that our circumstances never excuse our unethical choices?
3. Why is it important to recognize that God is in complete control over all creation, and that humanity is still morally responsible?
4. How is God's presence with us as royal judge a critical fact to consider as we make ethical decisions?
5. Why should Christians take comfort from the fact that Jesus is our mediator?
6. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' earthly presence as the supreme pattern of righteousness?
7. Besides indwelling us, the Holy Spirit gives believers special abilities to perform works of service for the church. What does this purpose imply about the proper use of spiritual gifts?
8. We are engaged in a spiritual war, but James 1:14 still says that that we fall into sin because of our own evil desire. How do our sinful desires and our enemies work together? What can we do to combat our sinful desires and our enemies?
9. Describe how a recent decision has affected other people. Did it benefit them or hurt them? Did it encourage them to behave more ethically, or did it encourage them to sin.
10. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

Glossary

angels – Intelligent, rational spirits with wills and personalities that are loyal to God and minister to man on God's behalf

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

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

demons – Fallen angels that willfully rebelled against God and fell into condemnation; evil spirits that interact with the natural realm in order to tempt and harm human beings

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

natural realm – The realm of created existence in which we live, including the physical world and all its creatures

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

open theism – Theological outlook that says the success of God's plans, purposes, and will are entirely dependent on history, especially on the choices that spirits and human beings make

preternatural – The realm of existence that is beyond or beside nature; includes invisible spirits such as angels and demons

sanctification – The act of making people and things holy

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

sovereignty – Theological term that refers to God's continuing rule and complete authority over all creation

supernatural – That which is above nature; refers specifically to God and his actions