

Making Biblical Decisions

Lesson 9

The Existential Perspective:
Intending Good

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.

- **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. Importance (3:14)

A. Concept (3:47)

A motive can be the *goal* of an action or the *cause* of an action.

Motives serve as causes, and our actions are the effects they produce.

“Motive” – an inward disposition that moves us to action:

- **complex**
- **general and specific**
- **known and unknown**

:

B. Necessity (9:13)**1. Heart (10:17)**

The “heart” – the sum of all of our inward dispositions

Obedience to God must flow from the depths of our inner person, involving our whole heart and a willing mind (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Scripture teaches that obedience must flow from good motives:

- Deuteronomy 6:5, 6; 30:2-17
- Joshua 22:5
- 1 Kings 8:61
- Psalm 119:34
- Matthew 12:34, 35
- Romans 6:17, 18
- Ephesians 6:5, 6

God required his people to love him and obey him with all their hearts (Deuteronomy 6:5-6; Romans 6:17).

2. **Hypocrisy (13:50)**

“Hypocrisy” – false appearance of morality

Jesus condemned the hypocritical Pharisees who were motivated by pride rather than love for God and neighbor (Matthew 6:2-16).

Even good people can be hypocrites (e.g., Jewish Christians in Galatia, Peter, Barnabas).

Paul rebuked Peter — his actions were hypocritical and motivated by a selfish desire to preserve his reputation (Galatians 2:11-13).

3. **Virtue (19:15)**

“Virtue” – praiseworthy moral character

Virtuous character expresses itself in the form of good motives.

The fruit of the Spirit summarizes the moral qualities God wants his people to have (Galatians 5:22-23).

Virtues are motives (Matthew 12:35).

Scripture says the virtues of love and faith are required for good works.

Our actions must flow from the love in our hearts (1 Corinthians 13:1-33).

The virtue of faith must move us to act in faithful ways; only then will God be pleased with our behavior (Hebrews 11:6).

III. Faith (23:29)

A. Saving Faith (24:15)

“Saving faith” – assent to the truth of the gospel and trust in Christ to save us from our sin

1. Mean of Initial Salvation (25:14)

Saving faith is the tool God uses to apply salvation to us.

Justification takes place when people come to saving faith (Romans 5:1-2).

Saving faith motivates us to repent of our sin and to trust in Christ for our salvation.

2. **Ongoing Commitment (27:58)**

The ongoing commitment of saving faith is a constant maintaining of the same faith that was the means of our initial salvation.

Faith is not merely a mental (cognitive) act (James 2:19).

Saving faith functions as a motive in the life of every believer, enabling, and even compelling us to do good works (Genesis 15:6).

Paul appealed to Genesis 15:6 to prove the doctrine of justification by faith (Romans 4, Galatians 3).

Protestant theologians often point to Abraham to prove that faith alone is a sufficient means of justification.

Abraham had saving faith long before God made a covenant with him in Genesis 15 (Hebrews 11:8, Genesis 12:4).

Every believer must maintain saving faith as an ongoing commitment, just as Abraham did (Galatians 2:20).

Those who have saving faith do not shrink back and are not destroyed; they stay the course in faith (Hebrews 10:38-39):

- if our faith does not remain in us, then it was never truly saving faith
- if we are not motivated to do good works, our faith is counterfeit

Saving faith always manifests itself in good works throughout our Christian lives (James 2:17-18).

The “Hall of Faith” appeals to Old Testament believers as examples for our own faith (Hebrews 11):

- Abel – offered pleasing sacrifices to God (11:4).
- Noah – built the ark and to preach against the sin he saw in the world (11:7)
- Abraham – obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac (11:17-19)
- Moses – identified with the Israelites though he could have enjoyed favor as a member of Pharaoh’s house (11:25)

- Old Testament saints (11:33-38):
 - conquered kingdoms
 - administered justice
 - survived threats to their lives
 - triumphed in battle
 - endured torture
 - bravely faced execution
 - endured persecution and mistreatment

We must constantly assent to the truths that God proclaims in his Word and trust in his blessings and salvation.

B. Repentance (41:44)

“Repentance” – a heartfelt aspect of faith whereby we genuinely reject and turn away from our sin

Faith is turning to Christ, and repentance is turning away from sin.

By faith we assent to repentance as an integral part of the gospel, and by faith we trust that God will forgive us when we repent:

- Cornelius – conversion was motivated by genuine feelings of repentance (Acts 11:18)

- John the Baptist – equated the motive of repentance with the motive of faith (Matthew 3:8)
- Paul – summarized the gospel in terms of repentance and good works (Acts 26:20)

When our hearts are truly repentant, our repentance motivates us to turn from our sin and to live in ways that God approves:

- Zacchaeus – turned from his sin of theft toward an ongoing life of faith and good works (Luke 19:8)
- Paul – turned from his sin of persecuting the church toward a life of faithful service to Christ (Acts 9).
- David – turned from his sin with confession and contrition toward faith (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51:12-14)

Modern believers are equally capable of falling into such heinous sins (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 82).

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” — Martin Luther

C. Hope (51:31)

“Hope” – faith directed toward the future aspects of our salvation in Christ

Salvation is not complete in this life.

God’s people were frequently exhorted to hope in God’s future salvation (Romans 8:23-24).

Hope is the confident belief that as surely as Jesus gave us his Holy Spirit, he will return to renew the world and to grant us our inheritance in it.

Our future salvation is based on the promises that were made to Abraham — “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:17-19).

This kind of hope motivates good works:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:6-10 – part of a believer’s armor that produces alertness and self-control
- Ephesians 6:10-17 – helps us control ourselves by protecting us from demonic attacks and temptations

We're also motivated to obey God by the hope of future blessings:

- Colossians 1:4, 5 – motivates us to love more greatly and to have stronger faith.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – increases our endurance, helping us to remain steadfast in our faith, and to perform works that are pleasing to God.
- 1 Peter 1:13-15 – prepares us to obey and be holy, and to endure hardship (Hebrews 12:2-3)

IV. Love (58:34)

Jesus summarized the teachings of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:37-40):

- greatest commandment – love God (Deuteronomy 6:5)
- second greatest commandment – love our neighbors (Leviticus 19:18)

These two commandments include all others and express the general principles that all the other laws explain and apply (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14).

The way to love God and our neighbors is to live according to the teachings of the Law and the Prophets, rightly interpreted and applied to our situations.

A. Allegiance (1:01:58)**1. Loyalty (1:02:16)**

Loyalty is the cornerstone of the concept of love.

God is the covenant, suzerain king over his vassal people, and the most basic responsibility of the people is loyalty to the king.

The suzerain's love was expressed largely in the form of covenant loyalty to his people.

The vassal people were required to be loyal to their king, and love their neighbors by respecting and caring for them.

Suzerains were described as a father, while the vassals were described as his children (Isaiah 64:8).

Their covenant relationship was at times described in terms of a husband and wife (Jeremiah 31:32).

Thinking of these political relationships in terms of family helped the people to see that this loyalty was to be heartfelt.

Moses used the concept of love to explain the loyalty and obedience the Israelites were to render to God (Deuteronomy 6).

God is our king — he does rule over us, he is sovereign, and we really are bound in covenant with him..

Jesus is our Lord and King, and we are to render love to him through loyal obedience, as well as through loyalty to his church.

If we remain steadfast in our love for him, he will reward us in his kingdom (Revelation 1:4-6).

Loyalty motivates us to serve our Lord and King and forbids rival alliances to other gods and idols in our lives (John 14:15).

2. Orientation (1:11:15)

Our lives must be comprehensively oriented around God.

Deuteronomy 6:5 summarizes the human person in terms of heart, soul and might — the whole person.

Scripture exhorts us to be totally committed to God with the whole of our being.

God and his people should be our primary orientation in life — the most fundamental commitments of our inward dispositions.

Jesus is the greatest example of a proper orientation in life.

Our allegiance to God and to our neighbors should lead us to have the same orientation in our lives (1 John 3:16).

When we make God the center of our lives, it affects all our decisions.

3. Responsibility (1:15:15)

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17):

- You shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not make for yourself a carved image.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet.

The Bible regularly applies these commandments to every area of our lives (Matthew 5:21-22).

Love for God should motivate us to discover all our responsibilities to him and his people.

B. Action (1:19:23)

1. Atoning Grace (1:19:34)

“Atoning grace” – the grace God demonstrated in the atoning death of his Son Jesus

God’s atoning grace serves as a model for our actions.

Scripture exhorts us to pattern both our character and our actions after God's (Deuteronomy 5:13-15; Matthew 18:23-35).

We should love each other in imitation of the love that God has shown for us (1 John 4:9-11).

We are to show the same kind of love for others that God showed to us in the atonement (1 John 3:16-18).

God's gracious example obligates us to give up our money, possessions, and even our lives, to protect and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. **Common Grace (1:26:40)**

“Common grace” – God's benevolence shown to all people

Jesus referred to God's common grace as an expression of his love for all humanity — a model that we are to imitate (Matthew 5:44-48)

Our love for God should motivate us to be good and kind to all people, even if they hate and persecute us (Exodus 23:4-5).

Jesus taught us to love our enemies.

We should have genuine concern for their well-being, and this concern should manifest itself in action.

God sometimes withholds his kindness in order to execute justice — an important aspect of love (Psalm 33:5).

God, who is justice, often uses his judgments as a corrective to drive sinners to repentance and salvation (Zechariah 14:16).

C. Affection (1:34:05)

Christian teachers argue that the Bible exhorts us to love in active ways, and that it doesn't matter how we feel emotionally.

Paul taught that works are morally good when they're motivated by heartfelt affection (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

To honor and worship God without affection is hypocrisy (Matthew 15:7-9).

1. **Gratefulness (1:36:47)**

Gratefulness should be our normal response to God's grace and benevolence, and it should motivate us to obey him.

God's benevolence should make us grateful, so that we *want* to keep the commandments that follow (Exodus 20:2).

Many theologians divide the Ten Commandments into two groups:

- Commandments 1-4 – address our love for God
- Commandments 5-10 – address our love for our neighbors

God's benevolence to us in Christ deserves our love and obedience (1 John 4:19; Colossians 3:17).

Our gratefulness to God should motivate us to obey him and to help those he loves.

2. **Fear (1:42:00)**

Unbelievers should have a fear of God's judgment, but this kind of fear of God has no part in the life of a believer (1 John 4:17-18).

Fearing refers to rendering wholehearted, loyal, active obedience to God and his commands (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

“Fear of God” – awe, reverence and honor for God that produces adoration, love and worship of God

Reverential fear is associated with confidence in God as our stability and salvation (Isaiah 33:5-6).

Reverential fear it is a delight (Isaiah 11:2-3; Acts 9:31).

It’s the understanding of who and what God is, and of what he requires of us:

- aspect of love – an affirming and appreciative response to God’s grandeur and goodness
- motive to perform good works – to honor and glorify the one we love

When we have a proper reverential fear for God, it motivates us to please him in many ways.

Results of “The fear of the Lord” in the book of Proverbs:

- “the beginning of knowledge” (1:7)
- “the beginning of wisdom” (9:10)
- “a fountain of life” (14:27)
- “prolongs life” (10:27)
- “one turns away from evil” by it (16:6)
- brings “riches and honor and life” (22:4)

The fear of God should motivate us to keep his commandments, and to do good to the creatures that he loves (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

V. Conclusion (1:50:20)

3. How does saving faith serve as a motive?

4. Discuss repentance as a primary expression of faith.

Application Questions

1. Why are motives so important to God? Does it bother you that he doesn't just ask for outward conformity?
2. Besides those discussed in this lesson, what are some inward dispositions that the Bible points to as legitimate motives for good works?
3. Reflecting upon your own heart, what motivates you to action? Does your outward obedience flow from a heart truly committed to God's and his Word?
4. How can we guard ourselves from acting hypocritically? What measures should be taken to ensure that both our actions and our motives coincide with our God's word?
5. Do you remember when you first came to saving faith? If so, how did this experience affect your motives and behavior? How have your motives and behavior changed over the course of your ongoing life of faith?
6. Is your life characterized by repentance? In which areas and in what ways are you actively in rebellion?
7. What practical steps can believers take toward ongoing repentance? How can we successfully overcome temptation?
8. Have you ever felt abandoned by God or unsure that our faith was true? Have you ever felt confident that your faith was true? What difference do these attitudes make in the ongoing lives of believers as we strive to make biblical decisions?
9. In what ways can you or your church reflect God's common grace to those outside the Christian faith, and even to your enemies?
10. Is your past understanding of love different from the description of love presented in this lesson? How? What impact will this have on the way you make future decisions?
11. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

Abel – Son of Adam and Eve who was murdered by his brother Cain

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

atonement – A sacrifice made to remove the guilt of sin and reconcile the sinner with God

atonement grace – The grace God demonstrated in the atoning death of his Son Jesus

Barnabas – Friend of the apostle Paul and cousin of John Mark (author of the second gospel) who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey

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

common grace – God's benevolence shown to all people

Cornelius – Captain of the Roman army from Caesarea who was converted to Christianity through Peter's ministry (Acts 10–11)

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

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

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

fear of God – Awe, reverence and honor for God that produces adoration, love and worship of God

heart – In biblical use, the sum of all inward dispositions; the seat of moral knowledge and moral will

hope – Faith directed toward the future aspects of our salvation in Christ; confident anticipation of a positive outcome

hypocrisy – The false appearance of morality

justification – Initial declaration of righteousness when a believer is acquitted of the guilt of sin and is credited with the righteousness of Christ

Luther, Martin – (1483-1546) Sixteenth century German monk and Protestant reformer who initiated the Reformation when he posted his *95 Theses* on the door of the Wittenberg church in 1517

motivation – Inward disposition that moves us to action

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

repentance – A heartfelt aspect of faith whereby we genuinely reject and turn away from our sin

saving faith – The blessings of salvation applied to true believers by the Holy Spirit

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

suzerain – A powerful emperor or king that ruled over smaller nations; the more powerful party of a covenant, the one to whom it was necessary to submit

vassal – A king or nation that must submit to a more powerful emperor or king (suzerain)

virtue – Praiseworthy moral character or an aspect thereof

Westminster Shorter Catechism – A traditional Protestant summary of Christian teaching, originally published in 1647