

# Session 6: Making Ethical Decisions in a Modern World

*Series: The Christian Life: Living Under Grace / Dr. Randy White*

- This session builds on the first five sessions.
- The series keeps returning to a few controlling ideas:
  - Doctrine produces ethics.
  - God’s character grounds morality.
  - Scripture corrects conscience.
  - Grace motivates obedience.
  - Right division prevents legalistic shortcuts.
- Session 6 asks how those truths help the Christian make decisions in areas that feel new, complicated, or unfamiliar.

## I. The Modern World Changes the Question’s Shape, Not Its Moral Core

- Scriptural truth:
  - Ecclesiastes 1:9
    - \* The forms of life change, but the basic patterns of human desire and folly remain familiar.
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17
    - \* Scripture equips the man of God for every good work.
- Why modern issues feel different
  - Many modern questions are not named directly in Scripture.
  - Earlier generations did not have to think through:
    - \* Artificial intelligence.
    - \* Social media.
    - \* Digital pornography.
    - \* Gender identity.
    - \* Genetic testing.
    - \* Fertility technology.
    - \* End-of-life medical technology.
    - \* Online gambling and digital money.
    - \* Constant entertainment and algorithmic influence.
  - These issues feel new because the tools are new, and because they move quickly, privately, and globally.
- The mistake Christians often make
  - We let the modern label control the whole discussion.
  - We ask, “What should Christians think about AI?”
  - Or, “What should Christians think about gender identity?”
  - Or, “What should Christians think about social media?”
  - Those are useful questions, but they are not the first questions.
- The better starting point
  - A modern issue usually has an older moral issue underneath it.
  - The Christian must learn to strip away the outer shell and ask, “What is this really about?”
  - Once we identify the real moral category, Scripture is no longer silent in the way we thought.
- The key idea
  - This is not first about modern life.
  - This is about truth, humanity, the body, life, death, justice, worship, conscience, liberty, love, and self-control.

## II. The Christian Must Learn the Basic Moral Categories

- Doctrine gives us the categories for judgment
  - We do not begin with instinct, emotion, fear, or cultural pressure.
  - We begin with what God has revealed (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
    - Truth
      - God is true (John 17:17; Romans 3:4).
- The Christian needs basic biblical categories before he can make careful modern applications (Romans 12:1-2).

- God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).
- Therefore, deception, manipulation, false witness, and careless speech are moral issues no matter what tool carries them (Exodus 20:16; Ephesians 4:25).
- If the issue involves authorship, honesty, public speech, reporting, advertising, impersonation, or secrecy, then truth is probably one of the central categories.
- Humanity
  - Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
  - Human value is not created by ability, usefulness, age, health, intelligence, wealth, or social approval.
  - If the issue involves identity, dignity, exploitation, disability, race, age, class, or human worth, then the doctrine of man is central (James 3:9).
- The body
  - The body is part of God’s creation (Genesis 2:7).
  - The body is not meaningless material to be used however desire demands (1 Corinthians 6:13, 19-20).
  - Male and female embodiment, sexuality, marriage, procreation, and physical limits all matter (Genesis 1:27-28; Matthew 19:4-6).
  - If the issue involves sexuality, gender, reproduction, bodily alteration, addiction, or physical desire, then creation and embodiment are central.
- Life and death
  - Life belongs to God (Deuteronomy 32:39; Job 12:10; Acts 17:25).
  - Death is real, but it is not ultimate (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).
  - The Christian should value life without treating technology as though it can finally defeat death.
  - If the issue involves abortion, embryos, euthanasia, suicide, medical intervention, or end-of-life care, then life and death are central.
- Justice and charity
  - God is just (Deuteronomy 32:4).
  - Love does not permit exploitation, partiality, cruelty, fraud, or indifference to harm (Romans 13:10; James 2:1-9).
  - If the issue involves money, labor, power, punishment, poverty, business, politics, or public policy, then justice and charity are central.
- Worship and desire
  - Man was made to worship God (Exodus 20:3; Revelation 4:11).
  - Sin bends worship toward idols (Romans 1:21-25).
  - Modern life often turns comfort, pleasure, approval, autonomy, politics, entertainment, or self-expression into ruling loves.
  - If the issue captures attention, identity, loyalty, appetite, or fear, then worship and desire are central (James 1:14-15).
- Liberty and conscience
  - Grace gives real liberty, but liberty is not void of moral criteria (Galatians 5:13).
  - Conscience matters, but conscience must be corrected by Scripture (Romans 14:22-23).
  - If the issue is not directly forbidden or commanded, then wisdom, conscience, influence, and edification must be considered (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

### III. Strip Away the Outer Shell

- The goal
  - The Christian should learn to say:
    - \* “This is not mainly about the new thing.”
    - \* “This is about the old moral category underneath it.”
  - That does not make every decision easy, but it does make the decision clearer.
- Scriptural truth:
  - Romans 12:1-2
    - \* The believer must be transformed by renewed thinking rather than conformed to the world.
  - 1 Corinthians 6:12
    - \* Not everything lawful is helpful, and the believer must not be brought under the power of anything.
- Artificial intelligence
  - The surface question is AI, but the deeper concerns are older moral concerns.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Truth and honesty.
    - \* Wisdom and discernment.
    - \* Personal responsibility.
    - \* Love of neighbor.
  - Clarifying questions:
    - \* Did I present generated work as my own?

- \* Did I use a machine to deceive, impersonate, manipulate, or avoid responsibility?
- \* Am I trusting output without testing it?
- \* Am I using this tool in a way that harms another person?
- Gender identity
  - The modern language is identity, but the deeper question is anthropology.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* The doctrine of man.
    - \* Creation.
    - \* The meaning of the body.
    - \* Desire and authority.
    - \* Truth and charity.
- Digital pornography
  - The private internet setting does not change the moral category.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Lust.
    - \* The body.
    - \* Exploitation.
    - \* Secrecy.
    - \* The image of God.
- Social media
  - The app is only the delivery system.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Truth.
    - \* Pride.
    - \* Anger.
    - \* Envy.
    - \* Stewardship of attention.
- Fertility technology
  - Medical possibility is not the same thing as moral permission.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Life.
    - \* Children.
    - \* Marriage and procreation.
    - \* The moral status of embryos.
- End-of-life technology
  - The question is not only what medicine can do.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Life and death.
    - \* The image of God.
    - \* Human limitation.
    - \* Care versus control.
    - \* Allowing death versus causing death.
- Online gambling and speculative money habits
  - The platform may be new, but the desires are old.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Covetousness.
    - \* Stewardship.
    - \* Contentment.
    - \* Appetite.
    - \* Responsibility.
- Political media and public speech
  - The political setting does not suspend ordinary moral duties.
  - Doctrinal categories that address this issue:
    - \* Truth.
    - \* Justice.
    - \* Fear.
    - \* Loyalty.
    - \* Righteousness.
- The practical point
  - Once the shell is removed, the Christian can say:
    - \* “I know what God says about truth.”
    - \* “I know what Scripture says about man.”
    - \* “I know what the Bible teaches about the body.”
    - \* “I know what God says about life and death.”
    - \* “I know what Scripture teaches about justice, love, liberty, and conscience.”
  - The new issue becomes less mysterious because the moral category is no longer hidden.

#### IV. The Pinnacle: Making Ethical Decisions in New Areas

- A simple method
  - Name the issue.
    - \* What am I actually deciding?
  - Strip away the outer shell.
    - \* What older moral category is underneath the modern form?
  - Ask what God has revealed in His Word.
    - \* What do I already know from Scripture about truth, man, the body, life, death, justice, love, liberty, conscience, or desire?
- Apply grace-shaped wisdom.
  - \* Does this revelation of Scripture fit the dispensation of the grace of God?
  - \* Does this honor the character of God?
  - \* Does this keep conscience clear?
- Act in faith.
  - \* If I cannot do it honestly before God, I should not call it liberty.
- What this protects us from
  - Panic

- \* We do not have to be afraid of every new issue.
- \* We do not have to assume that every new technology is a new invention of the devil.
- Naivety
  - \* We do not assume every new thing is morally neutral.
- Legalism
  - \* We do not invent rules simply because the issue feels unfamiliar.
- Cultural surrender
  - \* We do not let the world define the moral terms for us.
- Borrowed conviction
  - \* We do not merely repeat what our group says.
- \* We learn to reason from Scripture ourselves.
- Scriptural illustrations
  - Philippians 1:9-10
    - \* Love is to abound in knowledge and judgment so that believers may approve things that are excellent.
  - Romans 14:22-23
    - \* Conscience matters because an action that cannot be done in faith becomes sin to the person doing it.
  - Colossians 1:9-10
    - \* Paul prays for believers to be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding so that they may walk worthy of the Lord.