

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making and the Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Chapter 1 Definitions

(Note: This is a thorough reading guide for this chapter. These are not test questions. This is an important book for this class. We will discuss these questions in class. How well you read this chapter is, for me, a measure of how seriously you take your own calling to be a decision-making theologian.)

1. How does Johnson define *task decisions* and *identity decisions*?
2. What are the three “membership” questions?
3. What can qualifications for taking part in the decision-making process tell us about the group?
4. What does Johnson mean when he says “the decision-making process in groups may be camouflaged” (p. 16)? Why does this matter?
5. What happens to group practices when the possibility of change becomes real?
6. What does Johnson mean when he says that making decisions requires interpretations? Give an example.
7. What are the seven steps in the decision-making process, according to Johnson (p.18)?
8. Johnson writes, “the more organizational complexity we meet, the more we sense the power of “order” over that of “life” (p. 21). What does he mean? What do you think of this statement?
9. How does Johnson differentiate faith and idolatry in the decision-making process?
10. What does Johnson mean that faith is not attachment to doctrines, but a process of responding in obedience to God’s word (p. 25-26)?
11. From reading this chapter, in your opinion what is Johnson’s view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church?
12. What are three ways that theology articulates faith (p. 26)?
13. Who ought to do theology?
14. What are six ways that a theology (meaning you), interprets her or his own life (p. 28)?
15. What does Johnson mean when he says that stories involve selection?
16. How does theology help the church hear and tell its story (p. 30)?
17. What does Johnson mean when he says the canon is a “decision of faith” (p. 31)?
18. What does Johnson mean when he says that we must decide “how” the texts of the Bible are normative?

Chapter 2 Debates: The Authority of the New Testament in the Church

1. What are two extreme options Johnson says are available for understanding that the Bible has authority?
2. How does Johnson view “freedom” in the context of biblical authority?
3. Carefully read Johnson’s 11 “canonical theses” (p. 35-38). What caught your attention?
4. What does Johnson mean when he writes that the New Testament writings came into being as a result of a “midrashic process” (p. 38-39)?

5. What does Johnson mean when he says that the New Testament's ability to *author* is primary (p. 40-41)?
6. According to Johnson, what is the difference between author and "authorizer"?
7. What examples does he give concerning the freedom in interpretation that the New Testament authorizes? What thoughts do you have about this concept of freedom?
8. Why can it be difficult to develop a "biblical" or "New Testament" view on a topic (p. 42-44)?

Chapter 3

1. What does Johnson mean by the term "literary diversity" with reference to the New Testament?
2. What are the problems and opportunities that are created by the literary diversity of the New Testament?
3. What lessons can we learn from the "untidy" conversation in the New Testament?
4. What were the shared presuppositions of the early church fathers (p. 47)?
5. What are the positives and negatives of Origen's allegorical approach to Scripture?
6. What is the cause of what Johnson calls the "collapse of 'Biblical theology'" (p. 50)? Why is this a problem?
7. How does Johnson's definition of theology address this problem (p. 51-52)?
8. How does Johnson describe the "normative" role of Scripture?
9. Why is the "untidy conversation of the New Testament both a problem and a possibility (p. 54-58)?

Chapter 4 Difficulties

In this chapter Johnson explores what Scriptures teach us about using the Bible as a decision-making tool.

1. Why does he choose to use Acts to discuss this topic?
2. What are two "separate interpretive difficulties" in using these texts to explore the church decision-making practices (p. 62)?
3. What is Paul's attention fixed on? What does he clearly recognize?
4. What does Paul stress in his writings (p. 63)? Read two Bible examples that he uses. What catches your attention?
5. What does Paul say about impulses of the Spirit? How does he the problems ought to be addressed (p. 64)?
6. What is the different between legitimate and illegitimate freedom (p. 65)?
7. How does Paul respond to the problem in Corinth? How does he use Scripture?
8. Read the Acts 15.1-35 passage carefully? When does it talk about Scripture? When does it talk about experience? When does it talk about the leaders?
9. How has the "dominance of the historical method" effected theology use of texts (p. 71-72)?
10. What does Paul say about biblical narratives in Scriptural studies and theology (p. 73)?
11. What are the two main options in Luke's narrative (p. 74)?
12. List some of the literary difficulties Johnson describes.

13. How does Johnson believe Luke intended his story as a whole to be used?
14. What are the theological problems associated with trying to use this narrative?

Chapter 5 Decisions

1. Who is the most active character in Luke-Acts?
2. What are examples of God's direct impulse? What are examples of God's circumstances?
3. What examples of human vs. divine decisions does Johnson have to give?
4. What are the four cases of church decision-making in Acts that Johnson uses? What process does the church use to come to a decision in each case?

From Cornelius to Council: stages of a church decision

5. Why did the conversion of Cornelius create a crisis?
6. How can we tell this is an pivotal event in Acts?
7. In Acts 10 how does God's vision and Peter's human experience interact? What is Peter's response? Have you ever experienced direction from God that seems to contradict your understanding of the appropriate Christian response?
8. When Peter meets Cornelius, how does Cornelius's character and actions confirm that it is God's will to save him and other Gentiles?
9. How do Peter and the other's use experience to move toward their decisions regarding gentiles?

The Decision Defended: Peter in Jerusalem

10. Why is expressed opposition to a proposed idea an important part of the decision-making process?
11. What is the real problem that they are trying to resolve?
12. How does Peter use narrative in the decision-making process?
13. How do Peter and the council interpret these events?
14. How did experience and theological precedent interact in these stories (p. 100-102)?
15. On page 105 Johnson writes that surprisingly, the Scripture is confirmed by the narrative, not the narrative by the Scripture. What is so surprising about this?
16. Johnson writes that decision-making is a theological process. What are his three steps? (p. 106-107)
17. What does Johnson say is key to this process?