

The Book of Acts Lesson 4 3Q 2018

The First Church Leaders

Before we get into the material for this lesson, given the title for this lesson, and the importance of the story I wanted to follow up from Wednesday of last week about Ananias and Sapphira:

What do you think of the story of Ananias and Sapphira?

It is often presented that God punished them for their sin, but does the Bible say God punished them?

What does the Bible say? That they lied and they were confronted on their lies by Peter, citing the authority of the Holy Spirit and that they died.

What are the possibilities?

- Some suggest that it was punishment for sin—why can we be 100% positive that what happened was not punishment from God?
 - What is the punishment for sin? Eternal death—did they die eternally or will they rise again?
 - Does the punishment for sin occur before the Great White Throne Judgment or after? Had that judgment happened yet?
 - Then, this cannot be punishment for sin—it must be something else!
- It was natural causes—why should we doubt that their death was simply a case of dying of old age, or the body wearing out?
 - Because the circumstances are inconsistent with a natural death
- Dying from shock—why is this a possibility?
 - Because it is documented through history that people can die when confronted with a sudden shock, or a powerful shaman. The source of the shock being the confrontation by Peter and the truth. But we cannot know for certain because we are not told.
- God acting to put them to sleep as a therapeutic measure to protect the infant church; why is this a possibility?
 - Because God at times has acted to put people to sleep who were obstacles to His plan to save and heal the human race.
 - What might have happened had Ananias and Sapphira not died then? Might they have entered into some leadership position and the early church have been corrupted with greedy leaders? Might God have diagnosed, or judged, that a therapeutic excision of their influence was necessary for the health of the early church? If this is so, then recognize such an action was an act of love, not anger, and was designed to heal, not destroy and was not punishment for sin.

Here is commentary from a book entitled *The Acts of the Apostles* what do you think?

Ananias and Sapphira grieved the Holy Spirit by yielding to feelings of covetousness... They thought they had been too hasty, that they ought to reconsider their decision. They talked the matter over, and decided not to fulfill their pledge. **They saw, however, that those who parted with their possessions to supply the needs of their poorer brethren, were held in high esteem among the believers;** and ashamed to have their brethren know that their selfish souls grudged that which they had solemnly dedicated to God, they deliberately decided to sell their property and pretend to give all the proceeds into the general fund, but really to keep a large share for themselves. **Thus they would secure their living from the common store and at the same time gain the high esteem of their brethren.** {AA 72.1}

But God hates hypocrisy and falsehood. Ananias and Sapphira practiced fraud in their dealing with God; they lied to the Holy Spirit, **and their sin was visited with swift and terrible judgment...** [does this say punishment or judgment? Do we hear words like judgment only through the imposed law lens? Does it mean something different through design law lens? God judged it unhealthy and judged it would hurt the early church, and judged that the most therapeutic thing to do would be nip it in the bud to protect the spread of the healing remedy!] {AA 72.2}

Infinite Wisdom saw that this signal manifestation of the wrath of God was necessary to guard the young church from becoming demoralized. [What is the wrath of God according to Scripture? God giving people up to reap what they have chosen. What is the reason, given by this author, for the wrath? To punish their sin or to protect the young church?] Their numbers were rapidly increasing. **The church would have been endangered if, in the rapid increase of converts, men and women had been added who, while professing to serve God, were worshiping mammon.** This **judgment testified that men cannot deceive God**, that He detects the hidden sin of the heart, and **that He will not be mocked.** It was designed as a **warning to the church**, to lead them to avoid pretense and hypocrisy, and to beware of robbing God. {AA 73.4} [Is a warning to the living the same as punishment to the dead?]

God cannot be mocked, what Bible verse does this idea bring mind and does it give any insight into why God cannot be mocked?

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.⁸ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; Gal 6:7,8

Why is it God cannot be mocked? Because of design law, you reap what you sew. You cannot pretend to give up cigarette smoking, yet keep smoking, and still experience good health—why not? What laws determine the outcome? Who made the laws and sustains the operation of those laws?

Was this true for Ananias and Sapphira?

What does one reap when one chooses to separate themselves from God? Death, why is it we don't all reap death instantly? Because God graciously intervenes to suspend such consequences giving us more

time to reconsider. But, in Ananias and Sapphira's case, God let them have their choice.

SABBATH

Read the entire day's lesson: "Many converts at Pentecost..." What lesson do you gain from this?

Could the religious traditions of Judaism have been an obstacle to spreading the gospel?

Could people have been more interested in the forms of religion, carry out the ceremony in the right way, dressing in the right clothing, washing their hands in the right way—than actually experiencing renewal of heart and mind to be like Jesus?

What about today? Could the traditions of Christianity—the forms of religion, the way we practice Christianity be obstacles to actually spreading the gospel?

Could people be more interested in dressing the right way, not wearing jewelry, eating the right foods, going to church on the right day, the right method of baptism, than actually healing the hearts of people to be like Jesus?

Now, does this mean that there was no godly purpose or benefit to the religious ceremonies of Judaism? No, there was godly purpose in their institution—then what was the problem? When the object lesson, the ritual, the teaching tool **became more important than the reality** to which they were designed to lead people.

And in Christianity—does this mean there is no godly purpose to many of our traditions and rituals and forms? No, there is godly purpose to many of them, but the problem becomes when any of these elements, even when given by God, like the Sabbath, become more important than saving and healing people.

Why is it that the forms of religion, the rituals, ceremonies, traditions, practices can come to supersede the actual mission of bringing people to know Jesus as their Savior?

The motivation of fear—when we are afraid, where do our motives focus? On self, on not sinning, on not getting in trouble, no not having a demerit against our name. And if this is our motive what do we tend to focus upon? The right way to behave, keeping the rules. And is there a particular theology that harmonizes with the fear-based way of reading the Bible? The penal/legal systems of theology.

But when fear has been replaced with love for God and others—then what is the primary motive? Is it not to glorify God and help other people, even if it hurts us? Thus we don't focus on what we can't do, but our focus changes to finding all the opportunities to glorify God and reach other people with the saving truth about Jesus. This is design law theology!

SUNDAY

The lesson points us to Acts 6, when the Greek speaking Jews complained that their widows were being neglected in the distribution of resources.

How would you handle this?

How did the Apostles handle this?

Why were people selected to take charge of distributing the subsistence fund? Because the Apostles needed to focus on spreading the truth about Jesus. Could this conflict have been instigated by Satan to distract the Apostles away from their primary mission?

Was the selection of people to take care of this task, the setting up of a church hierarchy?

Were these seven people given some ecclesiastical authority to rule over the other members of the church?

What were they tasked with doing?

So, was this done to not only have improved equity in distribution but to take administrative burdens off the Apostles?

This is why our ministry has administrative support—some of you have send in emails that might not have gotten answered as quickly. This is because Francesca is on maternity leave and I am focused on many other responsibilities. Please be patient with us. Francesca is due back the beginning of August.

Read last paragraph, “The candidates were...” From where did the authority for these 7 originate? Who bestowed such authority on them?

Who selected them for this role?

Was this a top-down selection or was this a recognition from the community of people who possessed qualities to fulfill the role needed?

And the Apostles role in their selection—to select or to acknowledge, agree with, and give a blessing to those selected?

MONDAY

Read Acts 6:8-15:

Stephen, a man whose character radiated the grace and beauty of God and who was filled with power from heaven, performed many miracles and incredible wonders among the people.⁹ But

Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia, who were members of the Synagogue of Freemen, opposed him. They tried to debate with Stephen,¹⁰but their arguments couldn't stand against his wisdom or the Spirit who empowered his words.

¹¹So they bribed some men to slander him. They said, "We heard Stephen teach lies about Moses and God."¹²By doing this, they agitated the people, church leaders, and theologians who preferred a legal theology. These people arrested Stephen and brought him before the Jewish High Court.¹³They brought in their bribed witnesses who perjured themselves by saying, "This man is always speaking against this temple and God's written law."¹⁴We even heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy this building, and do away with what Moses taught us."

¹⁵All those sitting in the courtroom turned and looked closely at Stephen, and they saw his face radiating light, like that of an angel. *The Remedy*

What was the basis of the allegations?

- Were they alleging Stephen was teaching things that caused people to become criminals?
- Were they alleging Stephen was teaching people that God did not exist?
- Were they alleging that Stephen was denying that Moses was called by God and a deliverer of Israel?

What were they accusing Stephen of?

Wasn't it that he was undermining their interpretation of the meaning of it all?

And how did they interpret it?

What was Stephen teaching they didn't like?

The opponents to Stephen held to an imposed law construct of legal application and Stephen was teaching that all the Old Testament ceremonies and teachings were metaphor of a larger reality found in Jesus and to applied in the hearts and minds of believers.

What about today, do we find similar conflicts in the church today?

What happens when we teach the 10 Commandments have not always existed but were added after humans sinned?

Do some people accuse us, just like Stephen was accused, of denying the law of God?

What is the truth—have the 10 Commandments always existed or were they added later?

What evidence do we have to be able to know?

- What kind of law is God's law? Is it imposed rules or design law?
 - "But in heaven, service is **not rendered in the spirit of legality**. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, **the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of.**" {Mar 79.7}
 - What kind of law can exist and be applied to the lives of intelligent beings without their awareness of it?
 - When Newton described and wrote down the law of gravity what do you think people might have said? "A law of gravity—wow, that never occurred to me, I never thought it was a law."
- Can design laws, like the laws of physics, be fully understood by studying them from a textbook, and seeing their formulas written out on paper?
- Can the law of love be fully comprehended or understood on stone?
- Where, according to Scripture, is God's law supposed to be written? Heb 8, in the heart—why? Because it is a living law, the law upon which life is founded!
- Why did God write it on stone? Because of sin the law was no longer on the heart.
- Did the angels in heaven, who followed Satan, sin? Does that mean they broke the law? What law? Was it the 10 Commandments?
- Did angels in heaven have a law not to commit adultery or to honor their mothers and fathers written down somewhere?
- Was there an ark in heaven made out of wood, covered in gold, containing pieces of stone with 10 rules on them for the angels to refer to?
- When was the Sabbath created? Were angels in existence before earth was created? Job 38

Are you confident, based on reasoning out the evidence, that the 10 Commandments were not always in existence, but added later?

One of the founders of the SDA church wrote:

The law of God existed before man was created. [Why might some jump on that very true statement and say, "See the 10 Commandments were always in existence? Because they don't understand the difference between design law and imposed law. And think the 10 Commandments are the eternal law of God, rather than a mere distilled down version written for sinful humans] The angels were governed by it. Satan fell because he transgressed **the principles of God's government**. After Adam and Eve were created, God made known to them His law. **It was not then written**, but was rehearsed to them by Jehovah. {SR 145.1}

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was instituted in Eden. [What does instituted mean?] After God had made the world and created man upon the earth, He made the Sabbath for man. [What does made mean? So was the Sabbath in existence before it was made or instituted? Then could the Sabbath commandment exist before the Sabbath itself?] After Adam's sin and fall nothing was taken from the law of God. **The principles** of the Ten Commandments **existed before the fall** and were of a character suited to the condition of a

holy order of beings. After the fall the principles of those precepts were not changed, **but additional precepts were given to meet man in his fallen state.** {SR 145.2}

I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments... "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). In this scripture, **the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law.** {1SM 233, 234}

So what would it mean today, if we present the idea that God's law is design law, that humans are out of harmony with God's design and in a terminal condition and that God works through Christ to heal and restore; and in that understanding the 10 Commandments were added as a diagnostic instrument to help us realize our condition, but not as a remedy and when God has His way in our lives the purpose of the 10 Commandments becomes obsolete because we are restored to harmony with God's law; and then some stand up and accuse us of undermining the law?

Those who oppose what we teach oppose the Creator God and His design law of love and just like those who accused Stephen do so because they have accepted the lie of imposed law.

Some who oppose us may be like Saul of Tarsus, still seeking the truth, but so steeped in tradition they can't yet see it. So, we don't judge our opponents to be eternally lost, only that like Saul they are fighting against the true message of Jesus Christ!

Read the last paragraph, "Indeed, by Acts..." Do you hear Stephen acting as an attorney to legally prosecute the people?

Or is Stephen acting like a herald of truth to bring them to conviction for their healing and restoration?

It all depends on which law lens you read Scripture through.

WEDNESDAY

Read third paragraph, "While Stephen stood before..." Can someone explain to me where they get this idea?

I actually have no idea where they have come up with the idea described here?

Is anyone aware of any Scripture to support this idea? I am not. Yes, we have Scripture that Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father—but we don't have any evidence that Jesus is in heaven acting in a judicial manner to condemn people on earth. This is the lie of imposed law. In fact, the evidence we have is just the opposite:

Hebrews 10:19-23:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since Jesus died to bring us the truth about God and to eradicate selfishness from humanity, we no longer need to be afraid but can confidently enter the Most Holy Place—God's very presence²⁰ because Christ's death revealed the truth about God and ripped open the veil of lies told by Satan that blinded our minds, and destroyed the infection of selfishness that separated us from him.²¹ And since we have this great ministering priest who ministers the truth to all,²² let the truth permeate us, cleansing, transforming and changing us as we draw near to God in heart, mind, purpose, method, principle and character,²³ so that we may have ultimate confidence and trust in him who has revealed himself to be completely trustworthy. *The Remedy*

Does the picture of God presented in the lesson, of Jesus standing in heaven to find fault in order to condemn and prosecute us make you trust God more? Does it increase your love? What impact does it have upon you? Does it make you more fearful, more distrusting, seek greater protection from God? Does it make you more self-focused, worried about what you are doing so you don't get in trouble?

Who wants your mind corrupted like this? This idea of Jesus and God as our prosecutors seeking to find fault in order to punish is Satan's lie from the beginning. Our role today as God's representatives is to present the truth to free people from such distortions—to call them back to worship the Designer who made the heavens and earth and seas.

Read fourth paragraph, “This explains why...” What do they mean by salvation being mediated through the nation of Israel?

How is this true and how is it not true?

- Salvation being through Jesus and Jesus being born to a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then yes, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is of the Jews.”
- But, if it means that one had to become a member of the nation of Israel to be saved, then no it didn’t mean that.
- If they mean one had to have the Jewish religion presented to them to be saved, then no it didn’t mean that.

Bottom paragraph points out that Stephen, when being stoned, prayed for those who were killing him, then the lesson states, “Only a person with a superior character and unwavering faith could do such a thing, a powerful manifestation of his faith and the reality of Christ in his life.”

This is a powerful evidence of God’s goal—to do what? To eradicate the survival of the fittest drive, the me-first drive, the kill or be killed drive from human heart and replace it with love for others such that we would give our lives for others. This is not natural, it is supernatural and a gift of God as we partake of the divine nature.

Do penal legal theologies in which we view God as the source of inflicted punishment reduce fear,

reduce the focus on self, reduced the survival drive, or do such theologies inflame the infection of fear and selfishness?

THURSDAY

Read fourth paragraph, “The unexpected conversion...” Do you remember Peter having a difficult time accepting non-Jews and his vision of all the animals?

What does this mean that the apostles had to be convinced that non-Jews were to be accepted as full members of the body of Christ?

Doesn’t it mean that the apostles didn’t know everything, that they still had errors in their understanding, that even after their time with Jesus, after their conversion, after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they still had ideas in their head, in their comprehension that were not correct?

Does the fact they had errors in their understanding mean that they were not inspired by God?

So a person can be inspired by God and have errors in their understanding?

What does this mean for us today?

What about any other human being who we believe has been inspired by the Holy Spirit, do we allow that they could have had errors and had to grow and give up some previously held ideas?

Many in the SDA church believe EGW was inspired by God with prophetic insights. Any evidence that she grew in her understanding of Bible truth over time?

- First vision was 1844
- Sabbath keeping came about between 1848-1850
- It wasn’t until 1855 that Sabbath keeping was understood to begin at sunset on Friday
- The Great Controversy theme didn’t happen until 1858
- Health reform vision 1863
- Righteousness by faith message 1888 followed by a move away from legal understanding of salvation writing:
 - *Steps to Christ* 1892 (which the church did not publish)
 - *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* 1896
 - *The Desire of Ages* 1898
 - *Christ’s Object Lessons* 1900
 - *Education* 1903
 - *Ministry of Healing* 1905

What does all of this mean?



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Only God is infinite, all other beings, including sinless angels, are finite and do not possess all truth, all understanding, all wisdom, all knowledge, and thus every person must think for themselves and not trust others to think for them.

When we read Scripture, or any other writing we find inspired, we must compare that with other Scripture and God's laws in science and nature, and real-life experience—i.e. through design law lenses to come to the healthiest understanding.

FRIDAY

read and discuss question 2

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Check our website for new chapters of *The Remedy* the Psalms will be going up slowly as they are completed and edited. When an entire book of the Old Testament is complete then it will be added to the app and when you update the app you will get the new book. Thank you for your prayers and support as I work on this project.

September 14,15, 2018: Dr. Jennings will be Keynote Speaker at Crossroads Community Church in Georgetown, Delaware.

September 27-29, 2018: Dr. Jennings will be speaking at the Mega National Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors in Dallas, TX

September 30-Oct 2, 2018: Dr. Jennings will be speaking at NAD of SDA Mental Health Education retreat for pastors at Kettering, OH.

October 19, 20, 2018: Dr. Jennings will be doing a seminar at Camelback SDA church, in Phoenix, AZ.

November 9,10 2018: Dr. Jennings will be doing two presentations at Houston, TX, in conjunction with the AACC

December 1, 2018: Dr. Jennings will be doing an Aging Brain seminar in Dallas, TX. Organized by the Arlington SDA church.

January 4-6, 2019: Dr. Jennings will be speaking for the Florida Conference of SDA Women's Convention in Orlando, FL.

February 2-3, 2019: Dr. Jennings will be speaking Christ's Church of Oronogo, MO.

In partnership with Come and Reason Ministries and Hixson United Methodist Church

Mental Health Matters *Community Gatherings for Help, Hope and Healing*

The Aging Brain Thursday, August 13, 2018

What happens to the brain as we age? This presentation will examine the evidence-based lifestyle and non-pharmacological interventions which will protect your brain and diminish your risk of dementia.

Fix for Failing Families Thursday, September 13, 2018

Families are under attack, more than 50% of marriages end in divorce, in the U.S. almost 900,000 children are victims of abuse each year, and 77% of childhood deaths are caused by one or both parents. Discover principles and practice to bring healing to your family.

The Science of Belief Thursday, October 12, 2018

In this seminar we will examine the science of belief and demonstrate how modern quantum

understanding provides a scientific basis for the impact belief, including prayer, has on our physical health and can even impact the physical world around us.

Guilt Resolution Thursday, November 8, 2018

Do you struggle with guilt? Discover the difference between legitimate and illegitimate guilt and how to resolve each and how to prevent manipulating you with guilt.

The God-Shaped Brain Thursday, December 13, 2018

Our brains are in a constant state of flux. Moment by moment new connections are forming, idle tracks are being pruned back and brain circuits are changing. Discover how our beliefs change our brain wiring, our physical health, and even which genes are turned on or turned off. Do your beliefs matter – more than you ever knew!