



Lesson 7 - Q4 2018 When Conflicts Arise.

by Russell Atkins

SABBATH

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27, 28, NKJV).

What does this text mean? Will our ethnic differences, our genetic differences, our sex differences not exist in Heaven? Will we not recognize each other as women/men, conservative/liberal, black/white, etc.? Will there be no hierarchy in Heaven? Or will there be a different hierarchy than we are used to? Is this text even referring to our future home or our home on Earth now?

From the Lesson: *“One of the most difficult tasks of any Christian community is to maintain unity when differences of opinion arise on matters pertaining to the identity and mission of the church. These differences can lead to devastating consequences.”*

We are at a point in the history of our own church where we will be able to watch this occur in real time [see links below].

<https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2018/08/28/adventism%E2%80%99s-shocking-fulfillment-prophecy>

<https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2018/time-speak-out>

<https://atoday.org/autumn-council-2018-a-pyrrhic-victory/?fbclid=IwAR1QtCII5fRp3VBYAe3ZA2-FFzICvDENO39fxkqmPz6GEIc6GR8ij3RnQGI>

How are we to respond to differences of opinion? Differences of direction? Differences of mission?

Do our tactics matter, or just our goals? Do tactics matter even if we are presenting Truth?

The following is from the Teacher’s edition of the lesson:

- a. The problems were acknowledged openly. Too often conflicts are ignored in the hope that, by doing so, the conflicts would disappear on their own. Conflicts need to be acknowledged and dealt with promptly.



- b. One or more people were appointed to seek a solution for the problem. The individuals chosen were well known and trusted by the congregation.
- c. The stories and opinions of those involved on both sides of the conflict were heard.
- d. Scripture was considered. For instance, at the Jerusalem Council, the leaders considered both the law of Moses, which talked about circumcision, and the prophets, who predicted that there would be Gentile believers.
- e. Evidence of the leading of God was both presented and sought after.
- f. Finally, the decision was communicated, along with the reasons for
- g. the decision. When this could not be done directly by the leaders
- h. who had made the decision, a message was sent with an individual trusted by the church.

I think these are sound principles to follow for conflict resolution.

SUNDAY

Ethnic Differences

In the Church's infancy, some complained that Jews of Greek heritage were *allegedly* being discriminated against vis a vis food distribution. "This *perceived* favoritism" caused a distraction for the 12 apostles, and they were called upon to address petty disagreements instead of carry the gospel forward [see Numbers 11: 16-30].

I emphasize *allegedly* and the lesson emphasizes *perceived* because Scripture is silent on whether or not these charges were accurate. I personally doubt that there was any widespread food distribution inequalities, and suspect that the solution to the problem was more important to be recorded than the problem itself. One of Satan's most effective traps is to tempt an individual or group to perceive some inequality. It doesn't matter which side of the "inequality" one is on. The temptation of discontent is a strong one.

Remember that the "equality/inequality" argument originated in Heaven with Lucifer alleging equality with one member of the Godhead, and continues, unabated, here on Earth.

From the bottom section:

"What significance do you see in the fact that the leaders called many of the believers together [Acts 6:2) in order to try to work out a solution?"

Should we view this as a bottom up / grass roots solution instead of a top down / imperial one? What are some of the advantages & disadvantages to a bottom up solution?

Any lessons here for our church today?



MONDAY

The Conversion of the Gentiles.

This lesson is based on Acts 10 – Peter’s vision of the sheet being lowered from Heaven with a variety of creatures and the command to “kill and eat.”

The lesson notes that *“he had never partaken of unclean or defiled foods, as the law required (see Leviticus 11, Ezek. 4:14, and Dan. 1:8)”*

Which law required this?

Obviously, the vision was an object lesson for Peter [and the infant Church], and had nothing, whatsoever, to do with diet.

Did Peter learn the lesson [see Galatians 2: 11-14]?

Do we still have similar prejudices in our church today? How should these be dealt with?

TUESDAY

The Spirit is Leading.

The early Church had to rely on personal testimony and corroboration by witness testimony. How did they recognize the evidence of the Holy Spirit?

The 21st century Church has photographic, video, internet testimony in addition to the above.

Are we in a better or worse position to know if/when/how the Holy Spirit is communicating than the early Church?

In the last half of Acts 11, Scripture documents that persecution scatters and actually grows the Church. Which Design Law does this harmonize with? Can you think of any contemporary examples of this?

As a result of the spreading of the Gospel to more Gentile believers, more were converted, and the jealousy of some Jews was aroused.



WEDNESDAY

The Jerusalem Council.

What precipitated the need for the council? Was it not a group holding on to tradition, and mistaking symbolism for reality? Does contemporary Christianity make the same mistakes? List a few.

- The Sanctuary is a building in Heaven vs. made up of living beings.
- Christ's blood erases deeds from record books vs. erasing sin from humanity.
- God's fire is a fire of combustion vs. The Fire of Love.
- The Sabbath is an arbitrary test of obedience vs. A perpetual memorial that God values FREEDOM of choice and will never use His power to coerce.
- God killed His Son to assuage His wrath vs. God **GAVE** His Son to reveal His Character, and secure the healing Remedy for terminally ill humanity.

The council's decision to avoid food offered to idols, fornication, from eating animals that had been strangled, and from blood.

Do these requirements seem arbitrary or are there some Design Law implications from following these principles?

From the bottom section of the lesson:

“Was there ever a time you changed your mind about how you understood a deeply held belief? What did you learn from the experience that could perhaps help you when you might again have to question your understanding of a belief?”

I can speak from personal experience that I've changed my entire viewpoint on God and His government 180° from what I used to believe. It's taken decades and came with a lot of cognitive dissonance. I've had to admit that I misrepresented Him to many in my circle of friends and family in years past.

Think how much more difficult it would have been if I had made a career of teaching a mistaken God construct, if I had written articles and books promoting this erroneous gospel, and led others to believe the same.

THURSDAY

A Difficult Solution.

I would have titled today's lesson “An Elegant Solution.” The difficulty was in dealing with cultural biases and prejudice with the Jews. For James to distill the solution down to four practices [all based on Design Law] was pretty slick.



The lesson suggests that during the process, Old Testament texts were re-read and reinterpreted through a new lens. What is the likelihood that 21st century SDA's need a new lens to see both Old and New Testament passages?

FRIDAY

“The council which decided this case was composed of apostles and teachers who had been prominent in raising up the Jewish and Gentile Christian churches, with chosen delegates from various places. Elders from Jerusalem and deputies from Antioch were present, and the most influential churches were represented. The council moved in accordance with the dictates of enlightened judgment, and with the dignity of a church established by the divine will. As a result of their deliberations they all saw that God Himself had answered the question at issue by bestowing upon the Gentiles the Holy Ghost; and they realized that it was their part to follow the guidance of the Spirit.”

“The entire body of Christians was not called to vote upon the question. The ‘apostles and elders,’ men of influence and judgment, framed and issued the decree, which was thereupon generally accepted by the Christian churches. *Not all, however, were pleased with the decision; there was a faction of ambitious and self-confident brethren who dis-agreed with it. These men assumed to engage in the work on their own responsibility. They indulged in much murmuring and faultfinding, proposing new plans and seeking to pull down the work of the men whom God had ordained to teach the gospel message. From the first the church has had such obstacles to meet and ever will have till the close of time.*”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 196, 197. *Emphasis mine.*