TRANSPARENCY AND JUSTICE

The Watergate scandal of 1970 exposed corruption, illegal spying, and coverups within President Richard Nixon’s administration. Investigative journalists’ persistent efforts to expose the scandal demonstrated the role a free press plays in holding those in power accountable, especially when there’s a lack of transparency surrounding their activities. The whole ordeal reinforced the importance of unbiased justice.

From the beginning, the great controversy has centered around the fairness of God’s leadership. Satan claimed to be able to form a government that would be more transparent than God’s, with laws that would be more just. These accusations had to be dealt with in a public and open manner, in no small part because they were made in a public and open manner. For the heavenly beings, Christ’s death silenced any doubts about God’s intentions; His goodness shone through and unmasked Satan’s falsehoods and lies. Christ’s death allows God to legally restore fallen humanity to its original sinless state and its special role in God’s kingdom while also providing justice for the harm sin has caused. That one monumental act of love demonstrated to the entire universe why God alone is worthy of being Judge over all.

God’s judgments during the end times will once again demonstrate His character of justice and mercy blended together. The onlooking universe will again acknowledge the fairness and goodness of God’s leadership. And as a judgment that is made “in favor of the saints” (Dan. 7:22), all who trust God can look forward to this judgment with assurance.

Read This Week’s Passage:
Leviticus 16
Write out Leviticus 16 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verses 29 and 30. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
GENUINE REPENTANCE

The practices of the earthly sanctuary, given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, vividly illustrate the great themes of salvation. The wilderness sanctuary is a miniature copy of God's real sanctuary in heaven, where Jesus ministers as our High Priest (Exod. 25:9; Heb. 8:1–6). The sanctuary system explains God's work of salvation and justice on a granular, immersive, and educational level. God's judgment process is specifically represented through the Day of Atonement. Various rituals performed on that day have their eschatological echo in the final judgment, also known as the antitypical day of atonement.

The sanctuary system, established by God Himself, included a daily and yearly cycle of activities and festivals, all based on the Tabernacle. The more prominent daily activities included all kinds of sacrifices for a variety of different sins (see Lev. 1–7). Each sacrifice taught the Israelites the need for the substitutionary death of an innocent life to satisfy the law. This served as a daily reminder to the Israelites that God had promised to provide a substitute (Gen. 22:11–14).

While these daily, symbolic sacrificial services provided forgiveness and grace to the repenting Israelites, God's justice also needed to be explained. That's where the annual Day of Atonement as outlined in Leviticus 16 and 23:26–32 comes into play. All who had repented and claimed the sacrifice for their sins were safe, for the animal symbolically took the penalty that justice required. However, the originator of sin, and any unrepentant individual, would have to bear their sin and its consequences alone, as illustrated by the scapegoat (vv. 20–22). In addition, the authenticity of a believer's repentance was expressed by deep heart-searching and afflicting of soul on the Day of Atonement (v. 29). This activity of self-examination helped ensure the Israelite's genuine contrition so that their sin would be not only forgiven but legally blotted out as well. Anyone who refused this offer of grace and atonement “on that same day shall be cut off from his people” (Lev. 23:29).

The Day of Atonement was a solemn experience for the Israelites. Its implications should make every Christian pause. It teaches us that salvation is about not only the forgiveness of sin but also uprooting sin's cause. In other words, am I truly sorry for the sin I repent of, which leads to no more indulgence in it? or am I only sorry that I got caught and therefore keep going back to it?

God desires to bring about true and lasting repentance in us. Through Christ, faith in His Word, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are provided with both pardon and power. He stands ready to give us victory over our addictions and sins. He understands that, sometimes, this change doesn't happen overnight and can take time, but either way, His victory is available. We must claim it if we want our sins to be blotted out.
COSMIC COURTROOM

In many ways, the great controversy unfolds like a court case. In one sense, God is on trial for Satan’s charges against Him, and in another sense, humans are on trial for Satan’s accusations against them and to satisfy the demands of God’s law. In a third sense, Satan and his legions of fallen angels are on trial for their rebellion and sins. Justice must be served in every aspect of this case. It is a legal situation of epic proportions and complexity. The judgment will address and resolve all these things.

The end goal of the judgment is for every being in the universe, whether unfallen, saved, or lost, to know the truth about God’s character and Satan’s lies. It will also explain why some are redeemed and will live forever while others will be destroyed and cease to exist. In the end, all will acknowledge the righteousness of God’s judgments. Every case will end with saints and angels declaring, “Just and true are Your ways” (Rev. 15:3). To accomplish this monumental task, the judgment unfolds in three phases: the investigative judgment, the millennial judgment, and the executive judgment.

**The Investigative Judgment:** Any court that follows the proper process takes time to investigate the evidence before settling on a verdict. The court in heaven, which determines eternal destinies, is no exception; it is careful to consider all the evidence in its investigation. Every record is examined in the full view of innumerable angels, who are no doubt interested in seeing that God isn’t making any mistakes (Dan. 7:10). Various aspects of this solemn judgment were foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement. The Israelites knew this day to be one of judgment wherein those who searched their souls and repented could remain in the community while those who didn’t had to be cut off (Lev. 23:29). Before Jesus returns, each and every one of our eternal fates will be determined. Our Advocate, Lawyer, and Savior, Jesus, is there, making sure everyone covered by His blood is saved. Any claims of the law and of Satan against the saved will be legally dismissed, for they are covered by Christ’s righteousness. After every case has been decided, Jesus will come to reward every person according to his or her choices (Rev. 22:12).

**The Millennial Judgment:** The second phase of the judgment will begin at Jesus’ second coming and will last for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4–6). During this millennium, the redeemed will participate in the judgment process by reviewing the records of the unrighteous as well as the actions of the fallen angels (1 Cor. 6:3). This phase of the judgment allows the redeemed to understand God’s choices and to confirm that His decisions are fair and righteous.

**The Executive Judgment:** The third phase of the judgment takes place after the millennium, when every case has been reviewed and the rulings understood. Satan, the demons, and the resurrected wicked will be destroyed by consuming fire, and all sin will be forever eradicated (Rev. 21:4, 27).

God is love and justice. One cannot exist without the other. As messy as this life and cosmic war can be, we can take courage, for one day soon, it will all be in the past. Justice will have been served, all trauma will have been healed, and every living creature will again be in harmony with God, the law, and each other.
What relationship do the following verses have with Leviticus 16?

The Day of Atonement:
- Leviticus 23:26–32
- Number 29:7–11
- Hebrews 9

The Judgment:
- Daniel 7:9, 10, 21, 22, 26, 27
- Daniel 8:13, 14
- 1 Corinthians 4:9
- 1 Corinthians 6:3
- Revelation 14:7
- Revelation 20

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 16.
CONFIDENCE IN OUR HIGH PRIEST

The role of the high priest in Israel was multifaceted. He was the spiritual leader of the people and carried the most sacred responsibilities. As the only person allowed to enter the Most Holy Place—and only on the Day of Atonement—he conducted special rituals and sacrifices. The high priest also served as an intercessor and had judicial authority over the people. Even with all these responsibilities, however, he was still a sinful human being—only a shadow of our true, perfect, and sinless High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly was simply an illustrative copy, is where Jesus works to apply the benefits of His life, death, and resurrection to believers. Christ ascended to heaven in human form, which acts as a sign that He went to be our Representative, Advocate, and Intercessor. As Ellen White puts it, “In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us” (The Desire of Ages [1898], 25). Having lived as one of us, Jesus is there working on our behalf. He is our guarantee and assurance that we are not overlooked, forgotten, or misunderstood, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15, 16).

This shared experience is why we can have confidence in Jesus’ grace, guidance, and support in the judgment hour. Just like the Israelites engaged in deep heart searching, we too should take a serious look at our lives and let the Holy Spirit shine into every corner of our hearts. The investigative judgment is drawing to a close. It’s a solemn time, and we should not trifle with sin for even a moment. Satan knows how truly short his time is and will throw everything at believers to distract, discourage, and entice them to feel comfortable in sin.

If there were ever a time to be serious and committed, it is today! We have work of the utmost importance to do: the worldwide proclamation of God’s end-time call to repentance. Our salvation depends not on our performance but on Jesus. God has called us to live in grace-enabled surrender, in devotion to Him and His mission, and in gratitude for His abundant love and mercy. His perfect love casts out all fear and emboldens our work of witnessing for Him. Jesus combined His divinity with our humanity so that we, as humans, can become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).

Many people struggle with walking consistently with God, but those who grasp Jesus’ work as our High Priest have a hope that can solidly anchor them. As Hebrews 6 says, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever” (vv. 19, 20). An understanding of what Jesus is currently doing for us will give us a confidence and assurance that nothing can take away.
FACING LIFE’S RECORDS

“Every man’s work passes in review before God and is registered for faithfulness or unfaithfulness. Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling. Heaven-sent warnings or reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, the influence exerted for good or for evil, with its far-reaching results, all are chronicled by the recording angel.

“The law of God is the standard by which the characters and the lives of men will be tested in the judgment. Says the wise man: ‘Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment.’ Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. The apostle James admonishes his brethren: ‘So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.’ James 2:12.

“Those who in the judgment are ‘accounted worthy’ will have a part in the resurrection of the just....

“As the books of record are opened in the judgment, the lives of all who have believed on Jesus come in review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate presents the cases of each successive generation, and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, every case closely investigated. Names are accepted, names rejected. When any have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their good deeds will be erased from the book of God’s remembrance....

“All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life. The Lord declares, by the prophet Isaiah: ‘I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.’ Isaiah 43:25. Said Jesus: ‘He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.’ ‘Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.’ Revelation 3:5; Matthew 10:32, 33.” (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy [1911], 482, 483.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What makes the judgment essential for the conclusion of the great controversy?

Can you explain the three phases of the judgment?

How will the judgment provide closure to all created beings who have ever existed?

What does the high level of transparency in the judgment proceedings reveal about God?

In what ways is the judgment a promise to God’s people rather than a threat? In what ways can knowing about it bring peace of mind?

What kind of emotions do you think the Israelites felt on the Day of Atonement?

Do you think our church culture has emphasized the need for deep heart-searching and repentance too much or too little? Why?

What does it mean to you personally that Jesus is your High Priest?