



Links Players

Knowing God | The Lord our Scapegoat

...Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live [scape]goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness... (Leviticus 16:20-22, ESV)

After the USA's Ryder Cup loss to Europe, innumerable articles looked to place blame.

Everyone and everything was blamed for America's failure: the PGA of America's dysfunctional processes, the choice of Keegan as Captain, course setup, poor putting, bad pairings, lack of proper strategy, lack of chemistry in team formats, the "envelope rule," financial payments to players, the crowd's boorish behavior, and Europe's stellar play!

One article was cleverly titled, "Keegan Bradley is an easy scapegoat, but that doesn't mean he is the right one." The author's use of a word once prominent in our culture's verbal toolkit, "scapegoat," is revealing.

The modern definition of scapegoating is projecting blame onto an innocent victim, diverting attention away from the real culprit. In short, scapegoating is a diversionary tactic to avoid the consequences of one's actions.

The origin of the biblical idea of a scapegoat is significantly different: To address the issue of guilt, two goats are chosen. One goat is slain to assuage God's wrath. The second goat is released into the wilderness after the chief priest symbolically lays the people's sins upon it.

What possible significance does this have for the believer in the twenty-first century? Isn't this some antiquated ritual from Israel's primitive idea of an "angry God?"

This under-appreciated picture of the scapegoat from the Old Testament is hardly irrelevant to understanding who Jesus is and what he has done for the believer.

For those who battle shame, chronic guilt, and persistent low-grade depression, discovering the valuable truth residing in this ancient ritual and how Jesus fulfills this practice has tremendous liberating power.

Paraphrasing the late Geerhardus Vos, a world-renowned theology professor from "Old Princeton," these two goats symbolize parallel truths: the first goat is sacrificed, and its blood is taken into the Most Holy Place, representing propitiation (i.e., satisfying divine wrath and resolving the justice issue).

The second goat, known as the scapegoat, has Israel's sins symbolically transferred onto it by the high priest and is then sent into the wilderness, representing expiation (i.e., removal of guilt and cleansing of the believer's conscience).

Sadly, how many faithful followers of Christ still live under the dark clouds of guilt and shame over past sins that have been forgiven and forgotten!

Constantly beating oneself up for past failures unwittingly fails to grasp the significance of Jesus' death and traps the believer in a "life of quiet desperation."

When we fail to see the conscience-cleansing power of Christ's death and resurrection, we open the door to Satan's accusations, often struggle with mild depression, and typically try other methods to quiet our consciences.

The answer to a clear and quiet conscience is not found by suppressing our past failures with excessive drinking, abusing medications, or distracting ourselves with endless entertainment and unrelenting busyness; it is found in Christ!

Nor is a clean conscience found in making every effort to balance the scales by "doing good." Turn to Jesus and find a liberated conscience.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus! Thank you for a holistic salvation!

READING: Leviticus 16:1-22; Hebrews 9:13-14, 10:21-22.

1. After reading a few golf journalists, discuss the many ways they assign blame for the USA's Ryder Cup failure.

2. After mulling over these three texts, what do we learn about Jesus' death on the cross that applies to our desire for a clean conscience?

3. Application: What methods have you tried or are currently trying to silence the voice of your conscience over past failures?
