

The Gospel *and* Judgment



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Leviticus 16; Rom. 8:1, 34; Heb. 6:20; 7:25; 9:24; 1 Pet. 1:2, 18, 19.*

Memory Text: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

As Adventists, we believe that since 1844 we have been living in the antitypical day of atonement. This means that the earthly day of atonement was simply a model, a type, of this true day of atonement. In the same way that the animal sacrifices were symbols of the Cross, the earthly Day of Atonement was a symbol of the real one, the one inaugurated in 1844 by Christ's work of judgment in the heavenly sanctuary.

This, of course, is good news. After all, what is atonement other than the work of God saving us through Christ's blood? The law can't atone; obedience can't atone; character can't atone. Atonement comes only one way, through the Cross.

If, then, we are living in the day of atonement, shouldn't that be good news? Shouldn't any “day” dedicated to atonement, to God's work of saving us, be something we should be thankful for? Shouldn't we be rejoicing in the hope of living in the day of atonement?

Of course. The judgment is good news because it forms an inseparable part of “the good news”; it is the climactic application of the Cross in our behalf. This week we'll look at the gospel and the judgment, because it's only through the lens of the gospel that we can fully see just what the judgment means for us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 23.*

We Must All Stand

As we saw in week 2, the Bible is clear that there is a judgment and that this is a judgment by works, a judgment where our works come under scrutiny. (After all, what is a judgment without such a scrutiny?) Remember, Jesus said that we shall give an account of “every idle word” (*Matt. 12:36*). *Every* idle word? And is this not the same Lord who said that the “hairs of your head are all numbered” (*Matt. 10:30*), who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground (*Matt. 10:29*), and who said in His Word that He shall bring “every work into judgment, with every secret thing” (*Eccles. 12:14*)? *Every* work? *Every* secret thing? Thus, the whole idea of a scrutiny of works, an investigation in judgment, is biblical.

But more important is the question, How could any sinner stand when *every* idle word, *every* secret thing, comes into judgment? It’s a pretty frightening thought, standing before God in a judgment when everything you have ever done comes under review, especially before a God who, in His holiness, is a “consuming fire” (*Deut. 4:24*). What person, no matter how obedient, righteous, or faithful, has the kind of record that could put him or her in good stead with such a God?

Read Romans 8:34, Hebrews 6:20, 7:25, 9:24, and 1 John 2:1. How do they answer the above question?

The good news of the judgment is that Jesus, in His righteousness, gets us through the judgment because He stands there in our place. This is what His intercession, His high-priestly ministry, is all about. Otherwise, all of us would be lost because none of us, no matter our works, has enough righteousness to stand before a Holy God. Unless we are clothed in a perfect righteousness that none of us possess or could ever earn, we would have to stand in our own works, our own righteousness; and because we are all sinners, we would all be condemned.

“Man cannot meet these charges himself. In his sin-stained garments, confessing his guilt, he stands before God. But Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 471. How does this quote from Ellen White help you better understand your only hope in the judgment?

Key Text: *1 John 2:1*

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish the link between the Day of Atonement and the judgment.
2. To derive the fact that judgment is, of course, good news.
3. To understand the significance of the Cross in the context of the judgment and the gospel.

Lesson Outline:

I. Standing in the Judgment (*Rom. 8:1, 34; 1 Pet. 1:2, 18, 19*)

- A. Jesus stands in our place in the judgment.
- B. Without the perfect garment of righteousness, which is attainable only through Christ, we would all be condemned.
- C. Having Jesus as our Advocate and Judge gives us the highest hope to stand victorious in the judgment.

II. The Meaning of His Blood (*Heb. 9:12-14*)

- A. The earthly sanctuary is a model of the whole plan of salvation.
- B. Christ now stands in the heavenly sanctuary and ministers in our behalf the merits of His atoning death.
- C. Christ's blood alone can atone for sin.

Summary: Understanding the pre-Advent judgment in the context of the gospel gives us a deeper understanding of the plan of salvation. By accepting Christ as our Savior, we have a substitute who stands in the presence of God “for us” (*Heb. 9:24*) now, and especially in the judgment.

COMMENTARY

Jesus' incarnation is the ultimate form of God's self-disclosure. It is also God's way of dealing with sin and the great controversy. History finds its commentary, continuation, and culmination in Jesus. He acts as the Judge of human life. He not only is One among us; He is our Redeemer.

Jesus is the Man of the Cross and the Lord of the resurrection. As such, He defies death by exposing the true nature of evil and defines life by leaving the tomb empty.

Through crucifixion and resurrection, God reconciled the world unto Himself (*2 Cor. 5:19*), redeemed us from sin (*Gal. 4:4-6*), and vanquished the devil. That is the good news and the power of the gospel. Shall we choose to be transformed by that good news and power? Such a choice can at times be difficult, for it is Satan's goal to prevent people from doing so. Furthermore, he tries to lure people who already have chosen Christ to believe in a cheap grace that makes no demand on the mind or the life of the individual. Hence,

Blood and Judgment

Central to our theology as Seventh-day Adventists is the sanctuary, both the earthly as a model of the plan of salvation and the heavenly as the place where Jesus is now ministering in our behalf the merits of His atoning death. We as Adventists believe—based on (1) the earthly sanctuary model, (2) the book of Hebrews, and (3) the prophecies in Daniel—that since 1844 Jesus has been in the Most Holy Place, where the judgment, clearly seen in Daniel 7, is now taking place.

Much of our understanding for this comes from the earthly Day of Atonement, in which once a year the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary. This is found most clearly in Leviticus 16.

Read Leviticus 16. How many times is the word *blood* mentioned? What does the blood symbolize? See also *Heb. 9:12-14*.

Central to the Day of Atonement ritual was blood, a symbol for the blood of Jesus, shed in our behalf at the Cross. Also, because the Day of Atonement is the day of judgment, then judgment and atonement are closely linked. And, because atonement is, indeed, good news, judgment should be, as well. And it is, but only because of the blood, which represents the life and death of Jesus in our behalf.

Read Leviticus 17:11; Luke 22:20; Romans 5:9; Hebrews 10:19; 12:24; 13:20; 1 Peter 1:2, 18, 19. What do they tell us about the central role of blood in the plan of salvation?

Blood is a symbol of life; shed blood means death. All this was a symbol of Christ's life and death for us. And because blood was shed and then ministered on the Day of Atonement, this tells us that, central to the Day of Atonement, are the life and death of Jesus—in our behalf! That's why the judgment, for Christians, is good news. We have a Substitute who stands in the presence of God "for us" (*Heb. 9:24*), now and especially in the judgment.

Imagine your case before God on Judgment Day—without a Substitute! What hope would you have? Why, then, must you have a Substitute stand in your stead in the judgment?

Jesus warned His followers to be aware that, while discipleship is the initial step, judgment will be the last. Read Matthew 12:36 and Hebrews 9:27. Our lesson this week deals with the gospel and judgment. We will study the basis of the gospel, the certainty of judgment, and the relationship between the two.

I. Blood: The Basis of the Gospel

Read John 3:16, Romans 1:16, and Ephesians 2:8. These and other biblical passages make it clear that our salvation is founded on God's grace through Jesus Christ, the one who shed His blood on the Cross as an atonement for sin. Read Ephesians 1:7.

Blood is crucial to salvation. "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (*Heb. 9:22*). God hoped to teach Israel the seriousness of sin and the enormous cost of forgiveness through the sanctuary services. Blood played a most important part in both the daily services, where individuals brought their sin offerings, and in the annual service of the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 16*), where the High Priest used blood to offer an atonement for the entire congregation and the sanctuary itself.

II. The Gospel of Judgment

The gospel is good news not only unto salvation but also unto judgment. The God who saves is also the God who judges. Without judgment, the work of redemption stands incomplete. Observe the Day of Atonement again. The Most Holy Place contained the mercy seat and the ark of God, which contained God's law. The High Priest's cleansing of the Most Holy Place signifies not only the fulfillment of the work of mercy but the justification of the unalterable nature of the Law.

The Day of Atonement symbolizes the high-priestly ministry of Jesus. Adventists believe Jesus began this second phase of His priestly ministry in 1844. This phase is known as the pre-Advent or investigative judgment—a process so specific that through it God's love and justice stand vindicated before the universe. The blood of Jesus shed on the cross proved that God is both just and loving in His efforts to destroy sin and redeem the sinner. Thus, the work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary since 1844 is the fulfillment of the earthly sanctuary's Day of Atonement.

We are, indeed, living in the time of the heavenly Day of Atonement. Those who claimed to have accepted Jesus will have their fitness for heaven examined on the basis of their loyalty and discipleship to Christ. This examination also will demonstrate to the universe that Christ's atoning death vindicates God's position in the great controversy and His judgment on sin and Satan. The pre-Advent judgment is not a figment of theological imagination. Rather, it is God's appointed way for the universe to see that the

The Garment

Early in the quarter (week 2) we looked at the wedding parable in Matthew 22 as evidence for a pre-Advent judgment. Yet, there's more to this parable than just the timing; instead, it's a powerful revelation of what it means to be covered by the righteousness of Christ in the judgment and what it means not to be covered.

Read the parable (*Matt. 22:1-13*). **What ultimately made the difference between whether the man stayed or left?**

What does the garment symbolize? *See Isa. 61:10, Zech. 3:1-5.*

In this parable we see a clear example of someone who heeded the invitation to the wedding but not the conditions. He refused to accept what the owner offered him: the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness and, thus, upon investigation, was found wanting.

Notice, the parable said that both the good and the bad came. It didn't say whether the man without the garment was good or bad. In one sense it made no difference: Before God in judgment, we all—"good" or "bad"—without a garment stand condemned. What the guest needed at the wedding is the same thing that we need in the judgment, something covering us; otherwise, we will be cast out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That covering, symbolized by the garment in the parable, is the righteousness of Jesus, credited to His followers by faith—and it is their only hope now and in the judgment.

Whether through the imagery of the blood, or the garment, the point is the same: We need something other than ourselves to get us through the judgment. And the good news is that, through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have all that we need: the righteousness of God Himself (*see Rom. 3:21, 22; 10:3; 2 Pet. 1:1*) credited to us by faith.

Ponder this question carefully: Have you accepted the invitation to the wedding but not the conditions? What are those conditions? Be prepared to talk about these conditions in class on Sabbath.

cross and the love that drove the Savior there form the basis for the salvation of the faithful, the damnation of sinners, and the justification of God's judgment against sin and Satan.

III. Grace and Judgment: Their Relationship

Grace is the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus makes grace possible. Judgment is the power of God unto total cleansing and restoration. God's justice ensures judgment. Thus,

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Leviticus 16; Romans 5:6-11; 8:1, 34-39; Hebrews 6:19, 20; 7:24, 25; 9:24-28; 1 Peter 1:17-21*

- 1 The plan of salvation is not an add-on, an afterthought. It always has been part of God's plan to rescue His rebellious creatures. The prophecies of Daniel merely reveal, in broad brush strokes, the time line that stretches from Daniel's time to ours. What do these prophecies tell us about God's sovereignty? What do they say about our role in prophecy's fulfillment?
- 2 While past generations of Adventists may have viewed the pre-Advent judgment as a time to systematically reform their behaviors by sheer force of will, the gospel says that there is only one way to transform our characters from the inside out. What is it? Read Romans 12:1, 2. What form does that transformation take?
- 3 The parable of the wedding garment (*Matt. 22:1-13*) revolves around not just who came to the wedding but what they were wearing. What did the garment symbolize? Why is that a good representation of the garment God provides for our salvation? Why would anyone want to appear in God's judgment without a wedding garment?
- 4 "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," wrote the apostle Paul (*Rom. 8:1, NIV*). Why does it sometimes seem that even though Christians are delivered from being condemned by God, they cannot expect that same treatment from one another? Read Matthew 7:1-5. What would your congregation look like if it were a "no condemnation zone"? Is that even remotely realistic? Should it be?
- 5 What is the relationship between faith and works? Read Luke 18:9-14. To whom is this parable addressed (*vs. 9*)? In whose works can we put our confidence?

No Condemnation

Read Romans 8:1. What message is found in this text that is especially important for us, who face judgment?

The good news of the judgment is that we don't have to stand in our own righteousness. We can stand in the righteousness of Jesus. That we are judged by works doesn't mean that we are saved by them; we are saved, instead, only through the righteousness of Jesus, which is credited to us by faith, a faith that is always manifested by works. This righteousness covers us the moment we, through a complete surrender of ourselves to Christ, claim it for ourselves, and it stays with us (though not unconditionally) right through the judgment. After all, what good would being covered by that righteousness do any of us if we did not have it when we needed it the most, which would be in the judgment?

How does James 2 help us understand the role of works in the judgment?

But how do I know that I will have enough works to show that I have faith? That's a logical, but wrongly premised, question. It reflects that attitude of those who said, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (*Matt. 7:22*), or of the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (*Luke 18:11, 12*).

Instead, our attitude should be that of the publican, who smote his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (*Luke 18:13*). Those who have ever glimpsed the righteousness of Christ know that they must throw themselves on the mercy and grace of God and that their works—whatever they are, however much done out of a pure and loving heart—are never enough. This is why they have to live by faith, trusting in God's promises that He will save them because of Jesus and Jesus alone. It's the realization of the inadequacy of our works that drives us to faith and to the promises of salvation through Christ. And it's that faith—the faith that believes God's promises—that transforms the life, a transformation revealed in works.

both grace and justice are part of God's character in the destruction of sin, the cleansing of sin, the victory of God in the great controversy, the redemption of the faithful, and the ushering in of the new heaven and earth.

Paul is right, therefore, in pointing to the Cross as the basis by which God has declared "his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (*Rom. 3:26*). The pre-Advent judgment, then, is only a preface to the certainty of when all the universe will acknowledge what has been established during the heavenly Day of Atonement: " 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments' " (*Rev. 19:1, 2, NIV*).

Witnessing

Judgment. It has a rather final sound to it, and it should. A judgment is passed in criminal and civil cases; judgments are rendered at the end of the process. Sometimes an appeal can be made, but often those appeals are unsuccessful.

Judgments are often final.

But to leave things there would be to finish with only half of the story. This week's lesson details judgment—every idle word, every thought, every act will be judged—but for believers the judgment happens in a different set of circumstances.

The gospel enters in!

Think about this for a minute. This isn't some special incantation or formula we say to avoid judgment. It's not something you can buy; the true price of salvation is far too high for any human to afford. Rather, the gospel is what its name means: "good news." And the good news is that in this universal Day of Atonement, a sacrifice has been made that can, and does, pay for our sins. The sacrifice belongs to Jesus; when we believe, salvation is ours.

Unlike any other trial or any other proceeding in the history of the universe, this judgment can turn totally in your favor, however bad your record has been. Jesus has written on His hands the names of those He's forgiven. If you are in those hands, you have nothing to fear.

Courtroom proceedings are a fixation for many people: Novels, motion pictures, and television programs the world over concentrate on judgment and the final verdict. But in the courtroom of the universe, in the trial of all time, God's standard of justice is vindicated; yet, many of those whose sins prove that standard are spared punishment.

If that isn't something to tell a friend about, I can't imagine what is.

Judged by Works; Saved by Faith

Follow the train of thought below, looking up the various texts. How does this help you understand what a judgment by works means for us who are saved by faith?

A professed follower's life comes up before God: Every work, every secret thing, every idle word comes into review (*Ps. 135:14, Eccles. 12:14, Matt. 12:36, Rom. 14:10-12, 2 Cor. 5:10, Heb. 10:30*). Who could stand before such a scrutiny? No one (*Rom. 3:23, Gal. 3:22, 1 Tim. 1:15, Rom. 3:10*). However, for the true followers of Christ, Jesus stands as their Advocate, their Representative, their Intercessor in heaven (*Rom. 8:34, Heb. 6:20, 7:25, 9:24, 1 John 2:1*). And though they have nothing in and of themselves to give them merit before God, though they have no works that are good enough to justify them before the Lord, their lives—however faulty, however defective—nevertheless reveal their true repentance and faith (*Matt. 7:24-27, John 14:15, James 2:14-20, 1 John 4:20, 5:3*). How they treated others, the poor, the needy, prisoners, how they forgave as they were forgiven, the words they spoke, the deeds they did (*Matt. 7:2; 12:36, 37; 18:23-35; 25:31-46*)—while these things never could justify them before God, while they never could answer the demands of a broken law, they reveal those who have accepted Christ as their Substitute—and His righteousness alone, which covers them like a garment, gets them through the judgment (*Leviticus 16; Zech. 3:1-5; Matt. 22:1-14; Rom. 8:1, 34; Heb. 9:24; 1 John 2:1*).

Or, as Ellen White so clearly expressed it: “But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 472. The futility of our works for salvation should cause us to lean totally on the mercy and merits of Christ. Then, out of love and thankfulness for the assurance of salvation that's ours through Christ, we serve Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and body, a service that's expressed in works. How else could it be?

How well do your works reflect your faith? Or, is that the problem: Your works only too well reflect your faith? What things do you need to repent of and change in order to reflect more fully the righteousness of Jesus, which is yours by faith?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “In 1981, a Minnesota radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California. Police were staging an intense search for the vehicle and the driver, even to the point of placing announcements on local radio stations to contact the thief. On the front seat of the stolen car sat a box of crackers that, unknown to the thief, were laced with poison. The car owner had intended to use the crackers as rat bait. Now the police and the owner of the VW Bug [Volkswagon Beetle] were more interested in apprehending the thief to save his life than to recover the car. So often when we run from God, we feel it is to escape his punishment. But what we are actually doing is eluding his rescue.”—Unknown, “Salvation,” eSermons, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/salvation.htm> (accessed February 23, 2005).

Thought Questions:

1 Wednesday’s section of lesson 13 says, “The good news of the judgment is that we don’t have to stand in our own righteousness. We can stand in the righteousness of Jesus.” Being true, this makes salvation very simple. There is nothing difficult about being saved. In spite of this truth, we, as Christians, find it hard to accept the simplicity of salvation. Why do you think that is? What factors cause our skepticism?

2 The Sabbath section of this lesson says, “The judgment is good news because it forms an inseparable part of ‘the good news’; it is the climactic application of the Cross in our behalf.” How do we incorporate the judgment into our spreading of the good news? The judgment evokes images of a trial and the possibility of damnation. This can be a scary thought. How do we balance the good news of salvation with the seriousness of the judgment?

Application Questions:

1 What if God randomly picked the life you lived the past week to judge you? Consider the things you knowingly did that were wrong. Would you have lived differently if you knew that last week was “the” week? If so, how so? Why so?

2 Like the thief in the story, we sometimes run from God, even when He has our best interests in mind. Whatever our reasons for running from God—fear, guilt, shame, or otherwise—and though we know we should trust Him, we can’t help ourselves. What are some things in your life that compel you to run from God instead of letting Him help you overcome them?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, “Joshua and the Angel,” vol. 5, pp. 467–476.

In the context of the saints in judgment, Ellen White writes: “Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer. As Joshua was pleading before the Angel, so the remnant church, with brokenness of heart and earnest faith, will plead for pardon and deliverance through Jesus their Advocate. They are fully conscious of the sinfulness of their lives, they see their weakness and unworthiness, and as they look upon themselves they are ready to despair. The tempter stands by to accuse them, as he stood by to resist Joshua. He points to their filthy garments, their defective characters. He presents their weakness and folly, their sins of ingratitude, their unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 473. Again, in the same context: “Now he [Satan] points to the record of their lives, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer, to all the sins that he has tempted them to commit, and because of these he claims them as his subjects.

“Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: ‘I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

Discussion Questions

- 1 As a class, talk about your answers to the question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson.
- 2 Why do you think that for so many people in the church the pre-Advent judgment has been a cause of much fear and concern? Why must we keep the Cross at the center of our understanding of the judgment?
- 3 What can you do as a class to help all the members of your local church better understand the good news of the judgment?
- 4 What could you do for someone who is very discouraged about his or her walk with the Lord? How can you use what we’ve studied this week to give that person encouragement not to give up?