

We live in the age of the victim. Everyone is a victim. No one takes responsibility. The age of what Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear* calls admirable evasions. Everyone has a diagnosis. "It is not my fault." Humanity has always been blame shifters, but there is a unique scent in the air we breathe today. At heart its Cultural Marxism but you could call it critical theory or intersectionality or wokeness or identity politics. They divide the world into oppressors and the oppressed. So you have white/minority, cisgender/transgender, straight/gay, fit/fat, able bodied/disabled, male/female, Christian/other religion.

If you are privileged you are an oppressor and you need to be destroyed and replaced by the oppressed. This fuels everything from BLM to Defund the Police to Drag Queen Story hour to Queers for Palestine (someone needs to let them know that if queers go to Palestine the only drag that will be happening is them being dragged behind a truck on a rope / Its like chickens for CFA). So the most privileged person and therefore the most oppressive is a straight white male fit Protestant.

So the country is divided along these lines and others like never before. Identity politics. Us/ them rhetoric about all kinds of things. *Why?* Doubtless there are many answers, but part of the answer is guilt.¹ Now, some cultural commentators say guilt is a bygone category. They claim people no longer believe in God or in sin. Bologna. Guilt is a universal reality because all people know there is a God and know they do not measure up. Guilt drives much of the world and people don't know what to do with it.

Well, today in Western culture, one thing they can do with it is evade it. They can evade it by becoming a victim. If they can claim victim status, then they can't be held accountable or responsible and therefore they are not guilty. Victim status can help people sleep at night. "Its not my fault." You know this yourself – when you blow it and are caught, you quickly try to blame someone else. It is not that I am an angry man, I am just tired because I am over worked *by my employer*. I am not a nagging Mom, *they just* don't listen to me.

And if you can't claim victim status, the next best thing is to identify with other victims. To find a supposed group of victims and advocate for them. That will make me feel better. So I feel guilty because I know my homosexual lifestyle is a rebellion against nature and nature's God, but let me identify with Hamas who is being oppressed by big bad Israel and that will absolve some of my guilt. Why does the blue haired middle-aged woman care so much about illegal immigrants that she'll risk her life to be a blockade against ICE officers? Immigrants are oppressed so let me become a SJW for them. ICE are the bad guys. I am not bad, they are bad. This makes me feel better about myself.

This is why identity politics is largely atheistic. They have no way to absolve themselves of the guilt they have. Everyone wants a to blame shift. Hence the ever-increasing minute offenses and micro-aggressions, the cancel culture, the public shaming. Everybody wants to be a victim,

¹ See the brilliant essay by Wilfred M. McClay, "The Strange Persistence of Guilt" *The Hedgehog Review* 19.1 (Spring 2017).

wants to be released from moral responsibility and needs to find and identify someone else as the problem so my guilt can be assuaged. In other words, they are looking for a scapegoat.

Turn to **Lev 16** [89]. The book of Leviticus teaches us that the relationship between a holy God and sinful people must be maintained via sacrifice.² Chapter 16 is about *yom kippur*, the day of atonement. Structurally, it is at the heart of the book. Israel had been and continued to be idolatrous complainers. How could the holy God dwell with such sinful people? Through sacrifice. Through shed blood. Lev 17:11 says “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” The penalty of sin is death and blood is the symbol and representation of death, which is why we repel at the sight of it, which is why it is the first thing cleaned up at an accident site, which is why horror movie producers know that blood running down a white sink is an effective scare tactic.

The verb “make atonement” (*kippur*) occurs 16 times in this chapter alone. It can mean forgive, cleanse, ransom, or to avert God’s wrath.

1-5 Aaron’s sons had offered an unauthorized sacrifice back in ch. 10 and it cost them their lives. Then for six chapters God teaches his people about holiness, purity, and impurity. So the question is what about sin? That’s what ch. 16 is for. And there is to be no casual entry into the presence of God, for he is holy, holy, holy.

God meets his people at the mercy seat or atonement cover. It wasn’t a seat but a lid. It was a solid gold rectangular plate that sat on top of the ark. There is a similar sounding Egyptian word that refers to a place to rest one’s feet, which would make sense since the ark is sometimes viewed as God’s footstool.³ Aaron is to bring a bull and a ram and the holy garments.

6-10 Aaron, holiest man in Israel must make atonement for his own sin before he sacrifices on behalf of the people. Two goats: one killed and one sent away. Azazel is a debated word. It can mean complete destruction or rocky precipice. Some say it’s a proper name for a demon but sacrificing to goat demons is forbidden in the very next chapter (17:7). The word is only used here in all of Hebrew literature (8, 10, 26). At any rate, we know how the goat functioned.

11-14 He is to turn on the haze so that he doesn’t even see it lest he die and the blood is sprinkled on the atonement cover. **15-28**

The guilt is transferred to the goat, freeing the people of God from the penalty their sins deserved. The *scapegoat* is sent to die, not to be free. It is sent outside the camp to experience punishment for sin. In Leviticus, going outside the camp is to be cut off from the people (Lev 7:20-27, 17:4, 9-14, 18:29, 19:8, 20:3-6, 17-18, 22:3, 23:39).

² Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 43.

³ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 131.

29-34 Other ANE religions would offer sacrifices, but only when times were bad or they had a need. Like, during a draught or when infertile. But this is to be a perpetual sacrifice. Yearly. A statute forever. Because really, it is not so much because they sin – but that they are sinners. Not sins but Sin.

It is interesting, isn't it, that all this is done by only one man on behalf of the whole nation. Why? The Lord was teaching and preparing his people for his plan. His plan to appoint one unblemished high priest who alone would be the unblemished lamb who would be put out of the camp so that our debt might be paid. At the beginning of his ministry, "And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately *drove him out into the wilderness*" (Mark 1:11-12). At the end of his ministry, Hebrews 13: "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him *outside the camp* and bear the reproach he endured" (Heb 13:10-13).

Jesus is the GOAT. Greatest of all time. Our scapegoat. The unblemished lamb: 2 Cor 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Rom 8:3: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." / **Heb 7:26-28, 9:1-28, 10:11-25**. Therefore, in light of all this – three exhortations: draw near, hold fast our confession, stir one another up to love and obedience – and you can't do that if you don't show up.

Dearly beloved, the work is done. Jesus said it is finished. Every other religion says it is unfinished. You must finish it. Jesus says it is finished. Guilt gone. Debt paid. Conscience cleansed. Access granted. Propitiation achieved. Expiation accomplished. Jesus last words: it is finished. Buddha's: strive unceasingly.

What does that mean for us practically? Five ways: 1) You can have assurance. Reformation day was Friday. The Reformers and Puritans talked of Roman Catholic doctrine as the damnable doctrine of doubt. You can lay your head down at night knowing you have the love of God because of the finished work of Christ and the free grace of God.

2) You can gain victory over sin. You have forgiveness. Jesus has taken away our sin. Nailed it to the cross. Now, you are called to fight the sin that Jesus already paid for. William Romaine: "No sin can be crucified either in heart or life, unless it be first pardoned in conscience, because there will be want of faith to receive the strength of Jesus, by whom alone it can be crucified. If it be not mortified in its guilt, it cannot be subdued in its power."

I love me some Charles Wesley hymns. In 1739, he wrote a hymn on the anniversary of his conversion. He wanted to give praise to God. He named it, "O for a Thousand Tongues." One is not enough. As the man who discipled he and his brother John put it, "Had I a thousand tongues I would praise him with them all."

“O For a thousand tongues to sing
 My dear Redeemer's praise!
 The glories of my God and King,
 The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,
 Assist me to proclaim,
 To spread through all the world abroad
 The honors of Thy name.

Jesus! the Name that charms our fears,
 That bids our sorrows cease;
 'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
 'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of cancell'd sin,
 He sets the prisoner free;
 His blood can make the foulest clean,
 His blood avail'd for me.

“He breaks the power of cancelled sin.” He has cancelled our sin. Taken it away. Full and finally forgiven. But that’s not all. He then breaks the power of that cancelled sin. We can grow in holiness.

3) Jesus is the final sacrifice, but we now offer *spiritual* sacrifices. Romans 12:1 is filled with the language of sacrifice. There are 6 cultic/priestly words:

offer, sacrifice, holy, acceptable, spiritual, and service. Now, all that we do is worship. All of life. Jesus turns the market place into the holy place. So we sing, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days;
 let them flow in endless praise, Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love.
 Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee, Take my voice and let me sing always,
 only, for my King. Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee, Take my silver
 and my gold; not a mite would I withhold. Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt
 choose, Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take my heart it is thine own;
 it shall be thy royal throne,
 Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only,
 all for thee.” All of life for Christ.

4) Having been forgiven, we are now able to forgive. Col 3:12-13: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” [Ken Sande lays out 4 promises of forgiveness: 1) “I will not dwell on this incident.” 2) “I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.” 3) “I will not talk to others about this incident.” 4) “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”

5) Joy. What greater joy is there in being freed from guilt. / Identity politics has our culture divided. Looking for a scapegoat. Looking for someone to blame. With no desire or resources for forgiveness. The church has a better way. A solution. Good news. Ps 103:8-14:

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”

Look to Christ. Jesus is the great high priest, who is himself the once for all final sacrifice. He is the scapegoat, the unblemished lamb. He is the fulfillment of all the promises of God, starting in the Garden of Eden. There, Adam and Eve chose their own way and led the world into ruin. They had been naked and unashamed. After their sin, they are now ashamed. So God provided a covering. Animal skins. Something had to die to cover their shame (Gen 3:21). Then in Genesis 22, Abraham is called to sacrifice the promise child but at the last minute, God provides a ram in the thicket – a sacrifice that will substitute for the sacred son – Jehovah Jireh. (22:7-14). The Lord will provide.

Then Abraham’s family grows and is enslaved by the Egyptians until God frees his people by the death of the firstborn son. Every firstborn son in the land would lose his life – unless they took the life of an unblemished lamb and took the blood of that unblemished lamb and applied it to the doors of their house. When the Lord saw the blood he would pass over that house. Exod 12:12-13:

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”

Isa 53 – the song of the suffering servant: “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; . . . Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; . . . he was pierced for our transgressions; . . . like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isa 53:) / John the Baptist looked to Christ and said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). 1 Cor 5:7: Christ is our Passover Lamb. 1 Pet 1:19-20: we have been redeemed with “the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.” / **Rev 5:8-13.**

