

Holding Fast to Christ Who Holds Fast to You

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Scripture: Hebrews 4:14–16

God's word is like a sharp sword that pierces our hearts, and an X-ray machine that scans our innermost thoughts. Before the searching eyes of the Lord, all things are exposed and laid bare (Heb. 4:12–13). The people chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and sealed with the Spirit, know this by experience. Like someone who pulls back a rug to reveal the dirt that has been swept under it, the Holy Spirit using God's Word, shows children how they have sinned against their parents, fathers and mothers how they have sinned against their children, and all persons how they have sinned against God. For a time, they may have tried to form their own religion and righteousness to deliver themselves from their guilt and grief, and for a while it seemed to go rather well. However, like Jonah's gourd, what once shielded them from the tepid heat of a guilty conscience withers under God's blast of light. Then they see that they cannot save themselves. The cry arises in their hearts, "Is there no way by which I may escape eternal punishment, and be again received into God's favor?" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 12).

The great wonder of God's grace is the truth that God has provided a way. From eternity the divine Trinity planned that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, should become that way. The Father sent His Son, and

the Son came in the power of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish redemption for sinners. The Epistle to the Hebrews reveals God's Son as our Prophet to make known the way of salvation, and our King to make us bow to salvation, and especially our Priest to obtain this salvation by His precious blood. It is of this Savior and of His fullness as Prophet, King, and Priest that the Holy Spirit speaks in Hebrews 4:14–16.

Hebrews addresses people who already know that way to God and have professed their faith in Christ, but have become discouraged and are in danger of drifting away from their hope. It warns us against the terrible consequences of falling away from the living God and encourages believers to keep on believing and to stay faithful to the Lord. If today you are still in your sins and not saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then it is my prayer that this message will be a tool in the hand of God to rescue you even now. However, this text of Scripture especially speaks to God's saved people, urging them to "hold fast" or cling firmly to Jesus Christ. In God's Son, their great High Priest, discouraged and doubting Christians can find all that they need to take heart, press on, and persevere in the pathway of obedience.

It may be that you have come to this service deeply discouraged. Your heart is crying out to God, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Maybe, if you were honest, you would have to admit that you are tempted to walk away from Christianity and give up on the faith. Sin seems so strong, you feel so weak, and there is something darkly appealing about sinful ways of life. Perhaps your case is not so dire, but you do feel tempted to give up on your calling to bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You never thought that your

children would resist instruction so fiercely; you never thought that you would find it so hard to go on teaching them consistently and faithfully. Whatever your case may be, the Word of God is calling you to cling to Christ, and— if you are a Christian—to know that Christ is clinging to you. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, for he is a great Priest (Heb. 4:14), a compassionate Priest (v. 15), and a helpful Priest (v. 16).

Cling to the Great High Priest Who Clings to You
Hebrews 4:14 says, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” The author does not say, “seeing then that we have knowledge,” or “a spiritual experience,” or “good works,” but “that we have a great high priest.” He points us away from ourselves to find our hope in Christ alone.

Those engaged in rock climbing are always looking for something on which they can get a grip. That word “great” is like a projection of solid rock for the hand of your faith to grasp and hold tightly so that you don’t fall but keep moving upward on Hill Difficulty. There are many people in our world who claim to be priests, but here is the only Priest who has the greatness, in His achievements, past and present, His station, and His person, that we need. Verse 14 considers the greatness of His priestly sacrifice, heavenly intercession, and divine person.

The Greatness of His Priestly Sacrifice

As sinners, Jesus Christ is all that we need, for He has offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to take away the guilt of all our sins and reconcile us to God. The apostle had already written of Christ as our “high priest” in

Hebrews 2:17, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

The word translated “make reconciliation” means to conciliate someone who is angry so that rather than punish the person who offended him, he forgives him.¹ This is the primary work of a priest, to turn away God’s anger against sinners and obtain forgiveness by offering a sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 5:1 says, “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

In the first place, then, Jesus is great in His priestly work of sacrifice. All the Old Testament priests and sacrifices pointed to this great High Priest and found their fulfillment in Him and His sacrifice. He offered the only sacrifice that could satisfy the Father’s justice. The way of reconciliation can only go through the door of a perfect satisfaction to the justice of God and His wrath against sin. There is no other way. Modern man tries to make another way, but to do so he must invent a false god whose love is divorced from holiness and justice, thus cheapening grace. It is not the living God, who created the heaven and the earth, the righteous God who loves righteousness. He cannot deny Himself or compromise His justice.

Has that ever become real in your life? Have you ever longed to know that God’s anger against your sins is

¹ . See the use of this word (*hilaskomai*) and related forms in the Septuagint translation of Gen. 32:20; Ex. 32:14; 30:15–16; Lev. 1:4; Pss. 25:11; 78:38; Lam. 3:42–43. See Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” on Heb. 2:17, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:30.

quenched and you have peace with God? Sadly, we can be so concerned about what other people think of us, and care little for what God thinks of us. Yet behind all our anxiety and stress lies the unacknowledged fear that God is angry with us. Our conscience may speak with only a whisper, but it still speaks to us of the wrath of God against sinners. I work as an educator and greatly value education, but what good is education if we still lie under the wrath of God? Only by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can we be set free to serve the Lord.

What did Christ sacrifice? What offering could possibly satisfy the holy justice of God against the infinite offense of our sins? Not the blood of bulls and goats! Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself. "He offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27). He was both Priest and Sacrifice. He laid down His life willingly (John 10:18). He gave Himself as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). By one offering, which never needs to be repeated, He has perfected forever them that are sanctified, and has delivered His people from eternal condemnation. He brought His people into God's favor. He purchased heaven for them. He hung on the cross in their place so that one day they could sit on the throne with Him in eternal glory.

O people of God, do you see the horribleness of sin in His sacrifice? Sin cost the very blood of Christ, and truly, if we can remain unaffected by the love of Jesus Christ in His death, then our hearts are harder than rocks. Oh, to think that He did not die for His friends, but for His enemies! He died for those who, by nature, hate Him and crucify Him. Truly, He is the great High Priest. His sacrifice is perfect, meritorious, beneficial, and comforting for all those who stand in need of His priestly office. He is great because He is able to save and to succor His people no matter how wicked a sinner they may be.

His righteousness exceeds their sinfulness. His rights exceed their forfeits. There is a fullness in His death on Calvary which can never be emptied. He gave Himself—a gift of infinite value.

And He did still more. He did not remain in the grave. No, but it is the wonder and the victory of Christ over all His enemies that He arose from the grave and ascended on high. There He continues to perform His priestly office, only now not in the way of sacrifice, but in the way of intercession.

The Greatness of His Heavenly Intercession

Hebrews 4:14 says that our “great high priest... is passed into the heavens.” Literally, the original Greek reads, “He has passed *through* the heavens.”² The author alludes to the Jewish high priest going through the veil once a year into the holy of holies (Lev. 16; Heb. 6:19–20) to present the blood of atonement. Thus, says our text, that Jesus Christ, the greater High Priest, has ascended into heaven on high, into the very presence of His Father. Hebrews 9:24 says, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

It is as if the apostle is saying, “It is true, we Christians do not have a high priest on earth, but that is only because He has finished His work here. That only points to His greatness, to His superiority. And now, on the basis of that finished work He has passed through the heavens. He has passed through the starry skies. He has passed the seried ranks of angels. Yes, He, the greatest High Priest, has passed through the visible heavens into

² . See the use of this verb (*dierchomai*) in 1 Cor. 10:1; 16:5.

the heaven of heavens, not the symbolical holy of holies, but into the real Holy of holies, and there He sits enthroned on high.”

And now, exalted in heaven, the great High Priest does not forget any of His sheep. He knows them all by name. As Isaiah 49:16 says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” Therefore, He will never forget them. He will remember them forever. Not even the smallest in grace will be forgotten by this great High Priest even for one moment.

What a great comfort this can be—in times of affliction, in times of spiritual barrenness, in times of backsliding, believers may confess: “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me” (Ps. 40:17). People of God, no matter how afflicted, how harassed, how tempest-tossed you may be in this life at times, you shall never be forgotten. It is His own word: “Yet will I not forget thee” (Isa. 49:15). Upon His heavenly throne, your High Priest, who has passed through the heavens, sees you, knows you, cares for you, prays for you, pleads His own sacrifice for you, and will not permit you to be tempted above what you are able to bear.

But this great High Priest does more. By His bodily presence in heaven, He continually presents to His Father the sacrifice which He once offered, so that the guilt of His elect people will never appear before the judgment bar of God to condemn them. He presents the merit of His blood to the Father, and in virtue of that price which He has paid, He pleads for mercy. The atonement made on the cross for His people is continually kept on the foreground in heaven by Him who offered it up once and for all. That sacrifice is never forgotten for one moment in heaven, because the High Priest Himself

is always there, continually presenting it on behalf of His people.

As an Advocate, Christ pleads the case of His people in the courts of heaven, and by His intercession He obtains both an acquittal from all their sins and a grant of eternal life. Speaking metaphorically, He opens the book of debts and over all the sins of His people He writes, “paid in full,” on the basis of His obedience and sufferings. Therefore, Paul says, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33–34). And therefore, what an encouragement it can be for God’s people when the terrors of the law, the power of sin, the accusations of Satan, or the pangs of their own conscience assail them, that they are entitled by grace to look up unto Him, and to leave it in His hands, who is always standing ready to answer all accusations brought in against them. In this sense He is called the Advocate of His people by the apostle John: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

What a comfort this is to the believer! I hope that every person here takes your needs to brothers and sisters in Christ and experience that they pray for you. It is a great consolation in our trials to have a godly saint interceding for us. How much more, then, should it comfort us that Jesus Christ intercedes for us! It is all the sweeter when we consider who it is that is interceding.

The Greatness of His Divine Person

Hebrews 4:14 teaches us that our “great high priest” who has “passed into the heavens” is no one less than “the Son

of God.” Jesus is God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth (Heb. 1:10–12). He assumed humanity, but that did not in any way detract from His eternal deity. Jesus is very God of very God. Therefore, His priesthood is greater than all others, for it is divine as well as human. God’s people do not have a son of Aaron, but the Son of God as their High Priest.

The relationship of a son to his father in natural life is only a faint shadow of this relationship between God and Christ. Their relationship is so close that, although they are two persons, yet they are one in essence, as Christ Himself said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). And therefore, what amazing power the Son’s intercessions must have with His Father! His prayer is not the petition of the creature to His Creator, but the request of the Son to His Father. If the Father were to deny Him anything He would also deny Himself, or else He would cease to be one with His Son, which is impossible.

Therefore, the intercessory prayer of Jesus, the Son of God, cannot fail. His prayer knows no limits with respect to might and power, and therefore, what a great comfort it can be for poor people who, being burdened with manifold sorrows, feel that they cannot pray any longer, but only sigh and cry unto Him. If their salvation depended upon their prayers, then they know for sure they would be lost forever. But now, they find themselves leaning more and more upon this great High Priest, so that they must confess, “Without Him I can do nothing. I cannot even pray or thank the Lord rightly. But I have a praying High Priest who is the Son of God, and His intercession is always effectual.”

Application: Cling to God's Glorious Son

Hebrews 4:14 calls upon us to apply these great truths by a persevering faith: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” The word “profession” refers to our public confession that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the gospel.³ When we speak of clinging to Christ, it begins in the heart, but what is real in the heart overflows in the words of your mouth and the actions of your hands and feet. Clinging to Christ changes how you conduct yourself in all areas of life.

Profession of faith is costly. It can alienate friends and relatives and provoke persecution. Children and young people, are you holding fast this true profession with your friends—not just those at church, but in the neighborhood where you live or on the job where you work? Or are you ashamed to confess Him before others? Are you afraid to pray in front of people to give thanks for your food? Parents, are you weary of speaking to your children about Christ and His Word? Have you grown doubtful that it does any good and started to mute your witness to the children God entrusted to you to raise for Him? Are we ashamed of Jesus Christ? Oh what fools we are! Shall Jesus Christ confess us before the holy Father and we deny Him before mere men?

There is a people, a blessed people, by grace, who desire to profess Him—not only to others, but also in private upon their knees, in their meditations, in their Bible-reading, in their church-going, yes, in everything

³ . See the use of this term (*homologia*) in 2 Cor. 9:13; 1 Tim. 6:12–13; Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23; and its verbal cognate in Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:9; John 9:22; Rom. 10:9.

that they do. They desire that their whole life may be nothing but a profession of their faith in His name, however much they must complain that they find so many weaknesses, so many imperfections and inconsistencies in themselves.

But now, poor, afflicted people of God, the great encouragement of this exhortation is the promise of that same great High Priest. In the midst of all difficulties, He will sustain you, He Himself will cling to you by His heavenly intercession. Therefore, there is always hope in the Lord. You shall not perish. His priesthood secures you from shipwreck. Left to yourselves, you would never reach your heavenly home. And therefore, all the glory is unto Him and to Him alone! He is at the right hand of His Father, Jesus, the Son of God. He will not fail you. He is a complete Savior. He gives you the strength to hold fast your profession in the midst of all trials, difficulties, and tribulations, and He shall one day give you a crown of eternal life. Then, sinful self, sorrow, sickness, death, and Satan will be done forever, and He will become your All-in-all forevermore.

Cling to this glorious Priest, O people of God, knowing that He clings to you. The hand of your faith may be weak, but the hand of His intercession will never let you go.

Cling to a Compassionate Priest Who Clings to You

The danger of looking only at Christ's greatness and glory is that we may doubt that such a high and holy Lord would care for the small and insignificant likes of us. What does the Lord of glory have to do with me, such a bundle of fear, sadness, burdens, disappointment, temptations, sorrows, and worst of all, sins that

contradict and offend His holy nature? How can He ever look upon me?

The wonderful answer is that Christ is not only God, but man. He stooped very low to seek and find us where we are. Isaiah 53 tells us that He became “a man of sorrows”; he was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3). He has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (v. 4). Therefore, there is hope, for this Priest is not only highly exalted, but also went so low that He is capable of being full of sympathy and tender compassion towards His people.

This is the message of the next part of our Scripture text. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” He is not so transcendent that you cannot reach Him, nor so distant that you cannot touch Him, for He has been touched by all the sorrows that touch you. Therefore, here we find another reason why you can cling to Jesus Christ, whose sympathy was learned in temptations, guarded by sinlessness, and is exercised toward weakness.

His Sympathy Learned in Temptations

This great High Priest is all that we need, not only because of His exaltation but also because of His humiliation while He was on earth. From His lowly birth in Bethlehem’s stable to His shameful death on Calvary’s cross, He went through unspeakable temptations and trials for His people. Our text says that He “was in all points tempted like as we are.”

As man, Jesus Christ was tempted beyond any other man tempted before or since. He was tempted “in all points.” He was tempted during His whole life, though

with greater intensity during His years of public ministry and especially during the last few days of His life on earth. Therefore, He said to His disciples, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28). Consider Christ’s many temptations.

First, Christ was tried by Satan’s enticements. The Lord Jesus stepped out of the water of baptism into the fire of temptation (Matt. 4:1–11). He was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. Satan attacked Him fiercely, thoroughly, and exhaustively for forty days. Christ defeated every temptation with the word of God. Satan totally failed. Christ never wavered, and emerged from the fires of temptations as pure gold. However, Satan only departed for a season. The demon of hell sought to turn Christ away from going to the cross (Matt. 16:22–23). When that failed, the devil moved Judas to betray Christ and cast God’s Son into the greatest test of his life in Gethsemane and Golgotha (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Yet Christ persevered through it all, obeyed His Father to the end, and crushed the serpent under His holy feet.

Second, Christ was tried by man’s provocations. His own brothers did not believe in Him, but sought to drag him into their worldliness (Ps. 69:8; John 7:3–7). Crowds impressed with His miracles wanted to make him an earthly king (John 6:15). The Pharisees bitterly opposed Him, and the Sadducees wanted to make a fool of Him (Matt. 22:15–40). False witnesses accused Him and soldiers struck Him unjustly. Worst of all, His apostles abandoned Him, one of them betraying Him and another denying that he knew Him. Many people watched Him suffer and die, but mocked Him without pity. Christ was not stoic or unmoved by the insults of the wicked; the loneliness and disgrace heaped upon Him broke His heart

(Ps. 69:19–20). Yet He quietly and meekly received their abuse like a lamb taken to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7).

Third, Christ was tried by God's testing. All of Christ's tests came about by the Father's eternal ordination and the Spirit's providential execution (Matt. 4:1). One of Christ's greatest tests was to bear the sins of His people. The heavenly Father set before Christ the accursed cup of death, from which Christ's human nature shrank in horror (Mark 14:34–36). Never was such a demand placed upon a man. To obey His Father, Christ must not only embrace the painful, shameful death of the cross (Phil. 2:8), but also submit to the curse of God's holy law against sinners (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:10, 13). He must experience the wrath of God and be forsaken for our sins; when darkness came upon the land, Christ fell into the spiritual darkness of hell—the hell of divine dereliction and abandonment (Matt. 27:45–46). Nothing held Christ on the cross except His submission to God's will, and the joy set before Him, on the other side of it.

We so quickly grumble about our trials. We resent things that inconvenience us, and resent those who mistreat us. What are our trials and temptations compared to Christ's? We should put our hands on our mouths in shame over our murmuring. It was our sins that did all that to Christ. He was tempted beyond what all men together could possibly bear, and if not sustained by His Godhead, He never could have endured. Therefore, we may cling to Christ with confidence that He has truly walked in our shoes, through the valley of the shadow of death, and indeed experienced more fully the power of temptation than we ever shall—yet He overcame it, by faith in the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God.

His Sympathy Guarded by Sinlessness

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “was tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin.” Our Priest is pure of all wrong, as Hebrews 7:26 says, “Holy, harmless, undefiled.” If Christ had not been tempted, then we might question whether He was truly human. On the other hand, if Christ had yielded to temptation He could not have saved us from our sins, for He would need salvation for Himself. As it was, Christ could “offer himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14). He was a Lamb without blemish, a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice. Since He “knew no sin,” He could bear the guilt of our sins, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ was completely without sin. He was without original sin. Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, God broke the deadly chain from Adam to his natural descendants so that the Child born of a virgin was “holy” from the beginning (Luke 1:35). Christ was without actual sin. He committed no sin in thought, word, or deed. He could say to His adversaries, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46). Peter spent years in Christ’s company, yet said that Christ was “without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

Christ’s sinlessness guards His sympathy from all impurity. There is a wicked sympathy that sinners may have toward one another (Rom. 1:32). They wink at sin, pat the sinner on the back, and say, “It’s no big deal.” This is not a help to sinners, but greasing the skids to hell. Christ has sympathy for sinners, but never has sympathy for sin. His heart beats with compassion and love for us in our temptations, but also burns with holy zeal that we be delivered from sin. This is the sympathy that we need.

Christ is full of mercy to His people, but ruthless towards their sin, and thus absolutely committed to helping the saints to become holy.

Yes, He is fully qualified to help us to overcome temptation, for He faced it at every turn, but repelled all its advances. Since Christ has suffered under temptation, “he is able” to help those that are being tempted (Heb. 2:18).

His Sympathy Exercised toward Weakness

Christ’s suffering temptation and sinlessness under temptation makes Him the truly compassionate Priest. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Christ is “touched” with our weaknesses. The word translated “touched” means to have your heart moved with compassion for someone else’s hardships.⁴ It is more than just knowledge; it is feeling. It speaks of a unity of heart and spirit as one spiritual family bound together by love and tenderness.⁵ When something touches Christ’s people, Christ is touched.

Jesus is our brother in adversity, companion in sorrows, friend in affliction, and strength in weakness. Isaiah 63:11 says of the Lord, “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” To those who persecute His people, Christ says, “Why do you persecute me?” (cf. Acts 9:4). They are His body, and He is their head, and He is sensitive to all that affects His body (Eph. 5:28–30). The Lord said in

⁴ . The word (*sumpatheō*) appears here and in Heb. 10:34, of the saints’ compassion for other Christians in prison for their faith. It is used on parallel with being “companions” or “sharers” (*koinōnos*, v. 33).

⁵ . Compare the use of the cognate noun (*sumpathēs*) in 1 Pet. 3:8.

Zechariah 2:8, “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

Consider too that Christ not only is sympathetic to our sorrows, but, as the text says, to “our infirmities.” The word infirmity means weakness or human frailty. The Lord Jesus is wonderfully patient with us in our weaknesses, be it disability in the body, ignorance in the mind, fear in the heart, spiritual immaturity, waywardness, or tendency to stray from the right path (Heb. 5:2). Isaiah 40:11 says, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” When Christ sees us stumbling along in the way of discipleship, He does not respond harshly. Rather, our poverty and neediness stirs greater tenderness in His heart. He accommodates Himself to the needs of His flock, and He will not lose the weakest little lamb—for this is His Father’s will (John 6:39; 10:27–29). He guides with His staff, and protects us with His rod.

Application: Cling to God’s Compassionate Son

The Lord knows your burdens. He knows your sorrows. He knows your weaknesses and your failures. Yet Christ does not turn away from you in impatience or disgust, child of God. His heart is full of tenderness to you. He understands how hard it is to live for God in this dark world.

If you feel frustrated over the difficulty of educating your children, consider how frustrated Jesus Christ felt about training the twelve disciples! Even Christ cried out, “How long?” (Mark 9:19). He too knew what it was like to say, “Do you still not understand?” Or worse yet, “Are your hearts still so hardened?” (cf. Mark 8:17). When

Christ sees your frustration, He remembers His own, and His heart goes out to you in compassion and love.

And let us remember that the twelve disciples were not just students, they were also called to be the teachers of others—the apostles of Christ’s church. Christ has experience with the foolishness and sins of teachers too. Yet what do we read about Christ’s attitude toward His disciples? “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then He will never leave you or forsake you. The Lord Jesus loves you, forgives you of your sins, and will walk with you through all your trials. Always!

Christ is the Prophet of His people, and the supreme and sovereign Educator. Cling to Christ in His tender compassion, and know that He clings to you.

Cling to a Helpful Priest Who Clings to You

We have seen that our High Priest is a glorious Savior and a compassionate Friend. There is more. A person may have a high position and a tender heart, but lack the practical ability to help you in your specific needs. Not so with Christ. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” With Christ enthroned as our Priest, we have an open door to go to God and find the resources that we need.

Nothing is more valuable than access to the king. You know the story of Esther, a Jewish woman raised in exile by Mordecai, who was like a father to her. Esther was chosen to be queen to the pagan king over the Persian empire. Wicked Haman persuaded the king to authorize the slaughter of all Jews in the empire. Mordecai appealed to her to go to the king for help. Esther

reminded Mordecai that the king had not called for her for a month, and if someone dared to approach the king's throne without being called by him, that person would be killed—unless the king held out his golden scepter. This king not long before had had his first wife killed! However, Queen Esther risked her life by going to the king without an invitation. By God's grace, the king held out the golden scepter. Esther was then able to speak with the king, and obtained help in the time of desperate need. The Jewish people were saved by her boldness in going to the king.

Perhaps you feel like Esther sometimes. You know that you need help. You know that God is able to help you. However, you are afraid to go to the King in prayer and ask. Perhaps your mouth can say the words, but in your heart you have little faith that God will help you.

Hebrews 4:16 says that if you trust in Jesus Christ, then God's golden scepter is always held out for you. The door to His throne is always open. The help that you need is there for the asking. The emperor of Persia was a poor beggar compared to the living God. If Queen Esther could find favor with the king, how much more will the Bride of Christ find favor with God while God's Son sits at His right hand? To encourage you to cling to Christ, let us consider the throne of grace, the invitation of grace, and the benefits of grace.

The Throne of Grace

Boys and girls, our Scripture speaks of a "throne," a special chair where the king sits. A throne is a symbol of power, authority, greatness, wealth, dominion, dignity, and royalty. Seated upon his throne, a king made sovereign decisions and exercised just judgment. It lifted him up above other people to inspire awe and fear.

Thrones are magnificent. Solomon's throne was made of ivory and overlaid with gold. It had six steps and on both sides of the steps were six carved lions. There was nothing like it in any other kingdom on earth (1 King 10:18–20). Solomon's throne could not compare to God's throne, which John saw in the vision of Revelation, surrounded by a beautiful rainbow and like a storm-cloud from which came forth thunder and lightning (Rev. 4:3–5). The princes of heaven surround it with myriads of angels, all worshiping and adoring the Lord for His holiness, power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing (Rev. 4–5).

The Bible tells us that God's throne is also a throne of holiness: "God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness" (Ps. 47:8). It is a throne of eternity: "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting" (Ps. 93:2). It is a throne of righteousness: "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Ps. 97:2). And it is a throne of sovereignty: "The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. 103:19). Surely, it is a throne that inspires fear.

However, in Hebrews 4:16 God's throne is given a special name: "the throne of grace." The throne of glory is the seat of mercy. This is unfathomable and inexpressible. God's holy, righteous, sovereign throne is a throne of grace. Saving grace is God's purpose and power to rescue sinners from the hell that they deserve and to give them the heaven that they cannot merit or achieve. Grace chose sinners before time began, redeemed sinners by the blood of Christ, calls sinners powerfully by the Spirit so that they are justified by faith and sanctified, and carries sinners through all their trials to glory.

What this means for you and for me is that God's throne of sovereign power is now a fountain of mercy for sinners. John saw in Revelation that grace flows like a great river from the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1–3). It is cleansing grace, to wash away our sins. It is life-giving grace, to make us fruitful for the Lord. It is healing grace, to relieve us of every pain and sorrow inflicted by God's curse against our sins. God's throne produces not just a trickle of grace, but a mighty flow of grace because of the love of God and the merit of Jesus Christ. All of our needs can be met and the deepest thirsts of our soul quenched and satisfied by streams of living water that pour down on us from the fountain of life and the throne of grace.

The Invitation of Grace

Our text exhorts us, saying, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace." The gospel offers Christ freely to sinners. Revelation 22:17 says, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." If you are lost and perishing in your sins, then I say to you, yes even now, come to Jesus Christ and find grace and salvation. However, the invitation here in Hebrews 4:16 is addressed not so much to the lost as to believers in Jesus Christ. Christians still need to come, again and again, day after day, to the throne of grace.

What does it mean to "come...unto the throne of grace"? It is not a motion of the body. There is no physical place that is sacred in the new covenant (John 4:21). The coming in view here is a motion of the heart, coming to God by the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Hebrew 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God

must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” You come to the throne of grace by looking to Christ with trust and calling upon the name of the Lord for the help that you need.

Faith draws near to the throne of grace through humble prayer. Backsliding often begins with a neglect of private and public prayer. Prayer is the thermostat of the Christian life, for it both displays our current spiritual temperature and, if used well, engages God’s power to bring our temperature to where it should be. How is your prayer life? How often are you praising God? Confessing your sins and seeking forgiveness? Pouring out your fears before the Lord? Petitioning God for what you need? Interceding for others? Thanking God for His mercies?

Are you praying with faith in Christ that God’s throne is a throne of grace? Notice that our Scripture text says, “Let us therefore come boldly.” Boldly means freely, pouring out your heart to the Lord. Boldly does not mean casually, presumptuously, or irreverently; we are going to the *throne* of God. We are not telling God what to do or treating God like a mere human being, a sort of bureaucrat on high. However, it does mean we go confidently and cheerfully based upon God’s promises to us in Christ. We go with faith that God intends to answer our prayers and bless us with grace. We go believing that God is a loving Father who loves to give good gifts to His children. We go trusting that in Christ all our sins are forgiven. We go with consciences cleansed from dead works, entering the holy place without fear of rejection or dread of judgment. Is this how you pray? If not, get a grip on Christ’s gospel, and start to pray boldly.

The Benefits of Grace

Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” There are tremendous benefits to praying by faith in our great High Priest. The life of praying is a life of receiving and finding. The words used here echo our Lord’s promise, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth” (Matt. 7:8; Luke 11:10).⁶ This is not a blanket promise that every prayer will obtain what we ask, but it does indicate that God blesses the praying Christian. Effectual prayers are those that seek from God nothing but what He has promised to give us.

How God answers our prayers appears in the words used in our text. The first is “mercy.” Mercy answers to misery. God’s merciful heart is His compassion to relieve those in a miserable condition (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; Eph. 2:4). The second is “grace.” We also find “grace” when we come to God’s throne. Whereas mercy answers to misery, grace answers to guilt. God’s gracious heart is His goodness in giving blessings to those who deserve only curses. We have so many reasons to go to God’s throne of grace and receive more and more mercy and grace for the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7), continued protection from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14), the power to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world (Titus 2:11–12), and the strength to stand firm in suffering (1 Peter 5:10). No matter how much grace you have received, you still need to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). Yet you never need to fear that God will run out of grace, for Jesus Christ is “full of grace” (John 1:14).

⁶ . Matt. 7:8, Luke 11:10, and Heb. 4:16 use the same Greek verbs “obtain/receive” (*lambanō*) and “find” (*heuriskō*).

The last words of verse 16 are, “help in time of need.” Christ is able to help those in trials and temptations (Heb. 2:18). His heart is full of kindness and His hands are full of power. Furthermore, His mind is full of wisdom. Literally, we might translate the words, “well-timed help.” As we wait on the Lord for answers to prayer, let us remember that God’s timing is always perfect. We often feel that we must have an answer now, but God knows when to answer.

What a promise we have in this Scripture! Christian, you can go to the throne of grace and receive help from none other than the Lord of Hosts. Let us, therefore, stop wasting energy worrying and fretting, and instead devote ourselves to prayer and thanksgiving. Hebrews 13:6 says, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

Conclusion

Dear non-Christian, not one of the precious promises I have opened up in this text belongs to you. Whether you are a young child or a gray-haired senior citizen, if you have not turned from your sins and trusted in Christ as Savior, the Lord is not your helper, and there is no throne of grace for you. On the contrary, God is your angry Judge, and His throne burns with wrath against your sins. If you continue in your present state, the Son of God will appear with glory to damn you forever to hell, and the very sight of Him will fill you with dread, horror, and grief.

However, every one of these promises can become yours, if Christ becomes yours. All of God’s promises are “yea and Amen” in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). You cannot obtain them by religious rituals, good works, or good intentions. You must have Christ. Receive Christ Jesus now as your Lord and Savior by trusting in the gospel.

Today could be your first day of enjoying a glorious, compassionate, and helpful High Priest.

Christian, do you see why you must cling to Christ? Who can compare to Jesus? He is the great High Priest and exalted Son of God. He alone has shed His blood for the atonement of sin. He alone is the heavenly Intercessor and Mediator of grace. Where will you find another who is so full of sympathy, compassion, and tender mercy? Christ is the only way to the throne of grace, where you meet with sovereign grace that is sufficient for all your needs.

Therefore, cling to Christ in your temptations for grace to flee from sin. Cling to Christ in times of prosperity, lest ease and success make you proud, cold to God, and harsh with men. Cling to Christ when suffering persecution, whether it is blatant persecution or more subtle slander and rejection, so that you may find grace to persevere. Cling to Christ under the clouds of adversity, so that you may not fall into doubt and discouragement.

Cling to Christ in your homeschooling. Don't give up when you face discouragement. Hold fast to the Lord, and press on. I was once asked at a conference what my greatest weakness was in parenting. After thinking for a while, I replied that I panicked when our children went through a season when they kept doing wrong and I could not get them to stop. When in early elementary school, one of our children got in a habit of exaggerating and lying so much that I began to fear I was raising a pathological liar. However, that child left that bad habit behind and became a truth-teller. When your child sins, stay calm, keep doing what is right, and wait on the Lord. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eccl. 11:1). God's ordinary way is to use

training from godly parents for the temporal and eternal well-being of the next generation. Cling to Christ, and entrust your children to Him.

Children, you too must cling to Christ. Cling to Christ through all the great changes of life such as growing up, graduation, getting married, having children of your own, watching them grow up, and then suffering the trials of old age. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Cling to Christ with your last dying breath, for the sustaining of your hope and the glorification of His name. Cling to Christ, I say, every day of your life, for to live is Christ. And as you cling to Christ, remember that your High Priest clings to you. He is praying for you, even when you are not praying. He is loving you, even when your love is weak. He is working in you by His Spirit so that your repentance and faith will not fail. He is walking with you, though perhaps you cannot sense His presence. Christ is able to save you to the uttermost, for He ever lives to make intercession for His own. *Amen.*

