

*Hebrews 4:14-16. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**“What’s holding us back from approaching our God with confidence?”**

It just so happened that I turned on my television this weekend and an old episode of *Leave it to Beaver* was playing. Some of you might remember this rather popular television show that ran from 1957 – 1963, either from when it originally aired, or from the mostly black and white re-runs that apparently continue to air today. The series portrayed a rather ideal family, the Cleavers, who handled the issues of family life as a model of dignity and grace. The show was also sprinkled with just enough humor to make it a lasting family favorite.

In the episode that I was able to watch recently, the young boy, Theodore Cleaver, known affectionately as “the Beaver” finds himself in a heap of trouble. He had given into temptation as a neighbor boy had brought over a bucket of golf balls. The real trouble begins when Beaver is tempted to take his father’s golf clubs without asking. After giving in to his friend’s urging, he takes the golf clubs out and then when Beaver takes a swing the head of the driver snaps off. And now the Beaver isn’t sure what to do. He is afraid that his father will be upset and so he gives into the temptation of lying as he tries to cover it all up unsuccessfully. In the end, young Theodore, confesses to his father only to find out that the golf club was already broken. Ward Cleaver, the father, reminds his son that he can come to him and that as his son he doesn’t have to be afraid. Upon entering the kitchen, however, Ward’s wife, who overheard the conversation asks her husband if he would have gone to his father in such a time. Ward quickly acknowledges that he would have been too afraid to come to his father because his father had a tendency to resort to the razor strap as his preferred form of handling such situations. In the end, the episode leaves the viewer with the lesson that a son should be able to come to his father with confidence even in time of temptation or repentance.

Well, what lesson does God’s word want us to walk away with today as we think about approaching God in times of temptation and repentance? It is a lesson strikingly similar to the moral of the story from that old television episode, however, our Scripture reading for today is much more direct in revealing that important lesson about our relationship with God. In words far more concise than a 30-minute sitcom, or the above lengthy explanation, the final verse of our Scripture reading from Hebrews very much

teaches us that we can come to our God freely and with confidence through Jesus Christ: ***16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.***

In faith we should be able to approach our God with confidence. We should be able to freely come before our God and speak to him and confess our sins; and before we fall into another sin or another temptation we should have the confidence that we can and will approach our heavenly Father in our time of need so that he may help and support us as we resist temptation.

That's what we should do, but so many times we don't. And I think that's worth looking at today. As we consider God's Word for today. Let's consider, **"What's holding us back from approaching our God with confidence?"** As we study God's Word today we pray that God may lead us to see mercy and help in Jesus, who is our God and Savior.

Fear is one of the biggest things that holds a son or daughter back from approaching his or her father when they have done wrong. There is a fear of punishment; a fear that the father will act in anger towards the disobedient son or daughter. We might translate that kind of fear of punishment to our heavenly father, forgetting that unlike an earthly father our heavenly Father will not overreact. Nor will we ever catch our heavenly father in a bad mood or catch him off guard as we approach him at the wrong time. But that is the type of father we know and experience or have seen or heard of in life and so we act according to what we know from our earthly experience.

This brings us to another point that might keep us from approaching God in time of repentance and temptation: what we have seen and heard of him from the Word. If we do not carefully look at God's Word we might come away with the impression that God is a mighty and all powerful being who prefers to bring destruction and judgment. This is the almighty God who caused the heavens to pour down and the deep to burst open to create an earth-cleansing torrential flood. This is the God who reigned down fire from heaven on an unrepentant Sodom and Gomorrah. This is the God who was okay with Joshua and the people of Israel stoning Achan after he took some stuff from Jericho that he was not supposed to have. This is some of what we have seen and heard from our God, and this might make us think that this the way that God prefers to operate; that like Ward Cleaver's dad, our heavenly Father, would prefer to grab his razor strap of discipline before giving his children a chance to approach him and talk to him.

But to think that this is the way that God prefers to operate is to forget of the 120 years that he gave to the wicked people of Noah's day, showing them mercy, allotting them time to repent. To think that our God prefers violence in his discipline is to forget that God was willing to listen to Abraham's call for mercy upon Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of a faithful few, who just weren't present. To think that God prefers and loves to act in vengeance and anger is to forget that after the first sin he went looking for Adam and Eve while giving them a chance to repent. "Adam where are you?" God knew very well where they were but in his mercy he gave them a chance to come forward and confess their sin. He was patient with them. Even in the account of Achan, our Old Testament lesson for today, God gave Achan chance after chance to come forward and

repent as Joshua was narrowing the field by tribe, clan, and then family before coming to Achan and asking him face to face what he had done. God was acting in patience before having to act in judgment.

To act in violent anger is not God's preferred way, but rather he is a God of mercy and patience. And yet he is just and he is almighty, and thus when he acts in such a powerful way it is a needed discipline for the benefit of his children, something that is done in protection of those who believe in him, or as a decisive judgment on those who reject him. To know our God, our Heavenly Father, as scripture truly portrays him is to know a God who is a loving and merciful being who is not looking to catch his children so that he may punish them aggressively. No, instead, our God is very much interested in our repentance, that we would turn from sin and live for him. How revealing, how telling, these words God gave to his prophet Ezekiel. ***Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'*** (Ezekiel 33:11). To know and to recognize from Scripture that God is powerful, just, and holy, but he is also a God of great mercy. Patience, and grace - to remember this will help us as we approach him in prayer. Sinners who are undeserving of God's favor or mercy are assured of his patience and his goodness. We can even see this about our God in those biblical accounts that are so well known for his power-filled displays.

But, of course, the prime example of God's mercy and love is in Christ Jesus. The bible tells us that perfect love drives out fear. (1 John 4:18). And in love so perfect, God the Son came down to make things right between God and his children. The one who makes his rightful home in the heavens, came to pay for the many sins that we have committed, sins that deserved punishment and the righteous wrath of God, and Jesus took that all upon himself. Our terrifying fear of a holy and powerful God subsides when we learn more about his undeserved love and his mercy that he extends to us in Christ. Jesus came to make peace with us and God. He came to be the mediator that we needed. And in these verses from the book of Hebrews he is therefore given the description of our great high priest. ***14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*** Knowing Jesus, in faith believing in his perfect love and his perfect obedience for us, we are no longer afraid to approach God. We still respect and revere our almighty God, our heavenly Father, but we come before him freely as we confess our sins. We recognize the suffering and the punishment that we by all means deserve, but we hold firmly to this faith that we profess for we are confident that Jesus Christ has paid for the sins of the world. We are nothing but dust and ashes that deserve to be burned up in the fires of hell but God has shown us mercy in Christ. We are forgiven. Your sins are paid in full. My sins are wiped away.

And these words from Hebrews, not only lead us back to the salvation and forgiveness that our faith is based on, but it also points us forward to the type of thankful life that we will live. We will fight against temptation, thankful for mercy and forgiveness,

and aided in that fight by our Savior, Christ Jesus. And again the description of the kind of God and Savior we have is an important one. We do not have a God who is looking to catch us as we slip up, or has no clue what we go through on a daily basis, but he became one of us to resist every temptation that we face and was perfect. <sup>15</sup> ***For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.***

He was tempted in every way, yet was without sin. He knows exactly what we are going through. He can relate with us, and most of all he loves us. He loves us so much that he defeated sin and temptation in our place. He took on every sin, every temptation. He overcame lust and envy, hatred and anger, laziness and coveting, he took on all of it and won for us. That perfect love of Christ drives out any fear that we might have in approaching our God and Lord in times of repentance and temptation. Let us pray to the Lord for in him there is mercy and grace.

The devil likes to team up with our sinful desires and use the pressures of this evil world to lead us away from God. He does his worst to lead us into temptation and away from reaching out to God for forgiveness and help and support. Satan uses tactics that include doubt in the love of God, and an unhealthy crippling fear of God's punishment. He might even twist Scriptural accounts like the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah to taint our view of who God is so that we run from God and not to him. But God comes to us through his Word to remind us that the we can come to him. He is just, he is powerful, but he is also so full of grace and mercy. We can come to our God and Father and we can confess our sins freely. That perfect love of Christ drives out fear and assures us that we have been forgiven in Christ. Our perfect substitute lived in our place and then gave that holy life to pay for our sins. God will treat us who believe in Jesus according to his grace. The fear is gone and grace and mercy reign. The Lord has had mercy on us.

And that perfect love of Jesus also drives out fear so that we can come before our God, lay our troubles and anxieties before the throne of God as we search for help against temptation. He went through it all for us. May we go to him in prayer in our time of need, may we look to the Word for strength and approach the throne of grace in prayer for our loving God and Savior is there to help us in our time of need, no matter how much the devil wants us to think otherwise, our God will be there with his mercy and grace. He will help us fight temptation. He will be our refuge and strength, for he cares for us.

Even better than the most ideal TV dad we have a God and Savior in Christ Jesus who gives us real help and lasting mercy. In times of repentance and times of temptation let us pray to our God regularly and freely and boldly through Jesus Christ our God and Lord. Let us take home and live in that wonderful lesson that God has taught us with these words: <sup>16</sup> ***Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*** Amen.