

A COMPASSIONATE HIGH PRIEST AND A THRONE OF GRACE

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"For we have not a 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. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb 4:15, 16

What reason the church of Christ has to bless God for the epistles that issued from Paul's inspired pen! And though it may seem scarcely right to select one epistle more than another as pregnant with heavenly instruction, yet, I think, we may safely say, that the epistle to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Hebrews, have, of all the epistles, been most signally blessed to the church of the living God. And when for a moment we contrast their author, Paul the Apostle, with Saul of Tarsus, O how striking, how miraculous was the change that grace made in him!

Let us take our thoughts backward to three particular seasons in the life of Saul of Tarsus. View him, first, at the feet of Gamaliel imbibing from his lips that traditionary law, that code of rites and ceremonies, which forms at the present day the religion of Israel. Had it then been whispered in his ear, 'The time will come when you will declare these things to be "weak and beggarly elements," trample them under your feet, and scatter them to the four winds of heaven.' Would not that youth have said, 'Perish the thought!'

Move a step further in the life of Saul of Tarsus. View him working out his own righteousness, striving to set up a

religion whereby he could please God, and force his way to heaven. Had one then whispered in his ear, 'The time will come when all your hope will rest upon justification by the obedience of another,' he would have said, 'That time never will come; the sun may as well cease to rise as for me to look to another's righteousness whereby to be justified.'

Take one step further, and view him keeping the clothes of the witnesses, who had stripped themselves lest their loose garments might encumber them, while they were, according to the Mosaic law, to throw the first stone at Stephen. Had one then whispered in his ear, 'The time will come when you will believe in Jesus of Nazareth and die for his name.' would not the thought of his heart have been, 'Let me rather die first than that such an event should ever come to pass?' But, doubtless, these very circumstances in Paul's life were mysteriously overruled for the profit of the church of God. For he, having been in these states, has been able to trace out with clearer evidence and more powerful argument the truth as it is in Jesus, from having experimentally known both sides of the question.

The grand object of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to set forth the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Into that subject we cannot now fully enter; and yet our text leads us (**and may the Lord lead us by the text**) into some attempt to shew who this High Priest is, of whom the apostle here speaks. And I think the simplest, and therefore the best division of the subject will be, to shew, as the Lord may enable, in the **first** place, the mind of the Spirit in the 15th verse, (Heb. 4:15) "We have not a 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:" and **secondly**, the **exhortation** which flows from, and is based upon the priesthood of Immanuel, "Let us therefore come

boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

I.—I need scarcely take up your time by shewing at any length in what way the high priest under the law was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, there are certain points of resemblance, and certain points of difference, which it will be desirable to enter into, in order to illustrate and set forth more clearly the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in the words before us.

There were three points of **resemblance (there were more, but I confine myself to three)** between the high priest under the law and the great "High Priest over the house of God." The first was, that the high priest offered sacrifices; the second, that he made intercession for the sins of the people on the great day of atonement, by taking incense beaten small, and, putting it on the coals which were taken off the brazen altar, with it entered into the most holy place: (Lev. 16:12, 13) and the third, that he blessed the people. (Num. 6:23)

Now, in these three points did the high priest under the law beautifully resemble and set forth the great "High Priest over the house of God." But O, how feeble the resemblance! how dim the type! how shadowy the figure! The high priest under the law could only offer the blood of bulls and goats, which can never take away sin; the great "High Priest over the house of God" offered himself—his own body and his own soul—that precious, precious blood, which "cleanseth from all sin." The high priest under the law could only offer incense upon the coals taken from off the brazen altar; the great "High Priest over the house of God" is offering daily the virtue of his sacrifice by "making intercession for us." The high priest under the law could only pronounce the blessing

in so many words; he could not **give** or communicate that blessing to the soul; the great "High Priest over the house of God" can and does bless the soul with the sweet manifestations of his lovingkindness and tender mercy.

But again. There are points of **difference**, as well as points of resemblance,

i. The high priest under the law was but a man; the great "High Priest over the house of God" is God-man, "Immanuel, God with us," the eternal "Son of the Father, in truth and love," having taken our nature into union with his own divine and glorious Person.

ii. The high priest under the law died in course of years, and was succeeded by a high priest as mortal as himself; (Heb. 7:23) but the great High Priest above liveth for evermore to "make intercession for us."

iii. The high priest under the law might be (**and the apostle seems to make some allusion to the circumstance here**) one who had no sympathy nor fellow-feeling for the infirmities and sins of those for whom he made sacrifice; he might be like some of our priestly Dons who seem all holiness, and have no tender heart to feel compassion for backsliders, and those that are out of the way: but the great "High Priest over the house of God," the apostle here says, is one that is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

iv. The high priest under the law might be, or might not be, tempted: he might be, or he might not be, a man who knew the plague of his own heart and the workings of his fallen nature, and therefore might not be "tempted in all points" like unto those for whom he might sacrifice: but the great "High Priest over the house of God" was "tempted in all

points like as we are." and therefore can have, and has a fellow feeling for the tempted,

v. The high priest under the law was a sinner: but the great "High Priest over the house of God" is spotless, without sin, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." But the two points to which the apostle here refers, and on which I shall, with God's blessing, now more especially enlarge, are:

1. **First**, that our great High Priest, Jesus, is one that is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and therefore divinely suitable to us who are encompassed with infirmities. Here lies the grand distinction betwixt the child of God quickened into a sense of his deeply-fallen condition, and a self-righteous pharisee. The child of God, spiritually taught and convinced, is deeply sensible of his infirmities, yea, that he is compassed with infirmities, that he is nothing else but infirmities: and therefore the great High Priest to whom he comes as a burdened sinner—the Lord Jesus, to whom he has recourse in the depth of his extremity, and at whose feet he falls overwhelmed with a sense of his helplessness, sin, misery, and guilt, is so suitable to him as one "touched with the feeling of his infirmity."

We should, if left to our own conceptions, fancy naturally that Jesus is too holy to look down in compassion on a filthy, guilty wretch like you and me. 'Surely, surely, he will spurn us from his feet; surely, surely, his holy eyes cannot look upon us in our blood, guilt, filth, wretchedness, misery, and shame; surely, surely, he cannot bestow one heart's thought, one moment's sympathy, or feel one spark of love towards those who are so unlike him.' Nature, sense, and reason would thus argue, I must be holy, perfectly holy, for Jesus to love; I must be pure, perfectly pure, spotless and sinless, for

Jesus to think of.' But that I, a sinful, guilty, defiled wretch—that I, encompassed with infirmities—that I, whose heart is a cage of unclean birds—that I, stained and polluted with a thousand iniquities—that I can have any inheritance in him, or that he can have any love or compassion towards me—nature, sense, and reason—religion, natural religion in all its shapes and forms, revolts from the idea.

And therefore, to set forth the difference betwixt this compassionate, loving, merciful, tender-hearted High Priest, and such a stoical priest as passed by the bleeding one who had fallen among thieves, and would not turn his eyes lest he should be polluted by seeing blood in the path—to contrast, I say, this tender-hearted High Priest with such an unfeeling, religious stoic as this **(and many such proud, religious stoics have we in the pulpit and in the pew)** the apostle says, "We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." It is as though he would thereby specially address himself to the poor, burdened child of God who feels his infirmities, who cannot boast of his own wisdom, strength, righteousness, and consistency, but is all weakness and helplessness. It seems as if he would address himself to the case of such a helpless wretch, and pour a sweet cordial into his bleeding conscience. It is almost as if he said, What! thinkest thou, dear friend, that the great "High Priest over the house of God" will spurn thee away because he is so holy? No; we have not such a High Priest as this.' There is the negative. 'Let others have them, if they will; let others rejoice in such priests as they may; let them have all the comfort they can get from them.' 'Not so with us, dear brethren,' he would say. 'We, the children of God; we, that know each his own plague and his own sore; we, who carry about with us day by day a body of sin and death, that makes us lament, sigh, and groan; we who know painfully what it is to be encompassed with infirmities: we,

who come to his feet as being nothing and having nothing but sin and woe; "we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" but One who carries in his bosom that sympathizing, merciful, feeling, tender, and compassionate heart that he carried here below.'

There is no change in him; for he is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever;" one and the same Jesus that wept when he saw the tears running from the eyes of the Jews who would comfort Martha and Mary; the same Jesus who did not reject the woman with the issue of blood when she crept through the crowd to touch the hem of his garment: the same Jesus who listened to the cry of the Syro-phenician woman, and heard her prayer: the same Jesus who went about doing good, and had tears to weep over human misery and sorrow: the same tender-hearted, merciful, and compassionate Jesus is **now** at the right hand of God: therefore "touched"—how sweet the word! Do we not know something experimentally of it, when someone comes to us with a tale of woe: and we see the tear, not of the hypocrite, but of unfeigned sorrow, trickling down the cheek? or when a child of God comes to us, tells us how he is burdened with sin and guilt, and sets forth in sincerity and godly simplicity the exercises of his heart—are we not "touched?" Is there not a melting of the soul? a breaking down of heart? He may have come into our company, and we sat stern and unfeeling; we may have looked with a suspicious eye upon him, and doubted whether he had any grace at all in his heart; but let him open his mouth, let grace be clearly manifested in him, are we not "touched?" Is not our heart melted and softened? and is there not a sweet union felt betwixt him and us?

Carry this, spiritually, into the idea of our text. This compassionate High Priest is "touched," when we come with our sins, sorrows, infirmities, and complaints, and confess

those things which from time to time burden and distress our minds. We have not to deal with an unfeeling, hard-hearted, stoical high priest, who scorns us, turns his eye away from us, and says, 'Until you are very much holier, I can have nothing to do with you.' But his heart is touched, and softened "with the feeling of our infirmities." There are some who have the abominable presumption to say, 'Away with your frames and feelings!' These presumptuous wretches might as well say, 'Away with Jesus! away with the great "High Priest over the house of God!" as to say, 'Away with feeling!' For is he not "touched with the feeling of our infirmities?" Destroy feeling! and you do all that lies in your power to destroy the great "High Priest over the house of God."

Take away feeling out of my heart! you do all in your power to deny there is feeling in the heart of Immanuel. Shall he be "touched with feeling," and you and I never be touched with feeling? Shall frames and feelings be ridiculed, and contempt poured out upon them, when the Holy Ghost here sets forth Immanuel as "touched with the feeling of our infirmities?" Blessings be upon his name: immortal honours crown his brow, that he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," that he is not that stoical High Priest which some would set him forth: but that he has a tender heart, which melts, moves, and yearns over our infirmities and sorrows. And I am bold to say, that we can have no communion with the Lord Jesus Christ except we know he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." When I go to a man, and tell him my infirmity and sinfulness, if he assume a stern look, as though he were so holy that I must not go into his presence, does not that daunt me? Can I tell out the feelings of my soul—can I open the secrets of my heart to one that has no sympathy? As Hart says,

A faithful friend of grief partakes:
But union can be none
Betwixt a heart like melting wax
And hearts are hard as stone:
 Betwixt a head diffusing blood,
And members sound and whole;
Betwixt an agonizing God
And an unfeeling soul.

There can be no true union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ except so far as we know that he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" that we have his ear, and can pour into his ear the feelings of our soul; that we have his heart, and when we tell him what we suffer, his heart too is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." But O how numerous are these infirmities! The whole evening might be taken up with but a slight description of them; infirmities in faith, in hope, in love, in prayer, in reading the word, in preaching, in hearing—infirmities all the day long, so far as we are left to ourselves. And yet this blessed, merciful, compassionate High Priest can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

2. But we pass on to consider the **second** point which the Holy Ghost has here brought forward, connected with this compassionate High Priest—that he was **"in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."** I feel that I tread here upon very tender ground. I must move cautiously, very cautiously, lest I be betrayed into confusion and error. The Holy Ghost seems to me to have marked out the road by boundaries on each side: and as long as we keep within these boundaries, we keep to the mind of the Holy Ghost. What is one boundary? We must not pass it: "tempted in all points like as we are." What is the other boundary? "Yet

without sin." Between these two boundaries we may safely walk.

Are you tempted? Then you may see for your comfort, if the Lord is pleased to apply it to your soul, that Jesus was "tempted in all points" like as you. But then, there is this difference betwixt the blessed Immanuel and you and me, that when we are tempted it is not without sin. But he was "tempted in all points," like as we are, "yet without sin." Sin never touched him; it recoiled, if I may use the expression, from his holy, sinless, spotless nature. Sin charged upon him was the grief of his soul; but sin never found an entrance into his holy, spotless nature. Satan might hurl his darts against him; but "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." But it is not so with us. When temptation comes, there is that in our heart which responds to it. And this makes temptation to be such a dangerous and painful thing to a child of God, that there is that in his fallen nature which answers to the temptation; there is that in him which temptation suits, meets, and intertwines with; so that only by the grace of God is he kept in every hour of temptation.

Now, I believe firmly, that every child of God will have to endure temptation. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations:" and he adds, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." (James. 1:2; James. 1:12) Peter says, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." (1 Pet. 1:6) And when Paul was recounting, in the eleventh chapter of the epistle before us, the sufferings of the noble army of worthies, he says, "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were **tempted**, were slain with the sword." (Heb. 11:37) Thus these saints of God, in their day and generation, were tempted: and you and I, so far as we are saints, and children of God, must be tempted too. But how numerous

and various are our temptations! Some of these temptations are carnal: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" with all those base workings of our deeply-fallen nature, which are better alluded to than described. Then there are temptations to infidelity, temptations to error and heresy, temptations to deny the truth of God, temptations to doubt the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the personality of the Holy Ghost: in fact, there is not one branch of truth against which the most subtle temptations do not easily find an entrance into the carnal mind, yea, temptations too base to name, too horrible even to hint at.

Now here is the difference betwixt the Lord Jesus Christ and us—that these temptations fell upon his holy and spotless nature, but never entered into it: but these temptations do find access to us. 'But if that be the case,' one may say, 'how can the Lord Jesus Christ feel a sympathy for a poor tempted sinner like me? The Son of God was spotless, holy, harmless, undefiled: and I am sinful, evil, and wicked. I feel something within me that closes in with temptation. I have never heard of an error in which I have not found something for my heart to lay hold of. I never hear of a sin without there being something in my heart that seems at once to close in with it. Heresy cannot come abroad without there being something in me that is ready to fall in with it. If the Lord Jesus Christ, then, were tempted like as we are, what is the difference between him and us in this matter?' I would ask you, what is it in us that makes us feel temptation and groan and cry beneath its weight? What is it that makes us hate sin, abhor heresy, and cleave to the truth—which makes us look to the Lord to deliver us from the power of sin, and trample temptation under our feet? The grace of God in the soul; is it not? The Holy Ghost, we would fain hope, having raised up, through mercy, in our hearts a spiritual and new nature that

sees the temptation, feels the temptation, hates the temptation, groans under the temptation and flees unto God to deliver us from the temptation.

Now, if temptation is painful to us, it is only painful so far as we are partakers of grace. Temptation is not painful to the ungodly: it creates no agonizing feelings in the dead sinner; but those whose consciences are made and kept alive, those who desire in their heart and soul to love God and live to his glory, and to hate with perfect hatred everything that he hates: they, and they alone, feel, groan, sigh, cry, and lament deeply under the power of temptation.

Now if we who know and feel so little, find temptation a weight and burden, let us look at the Lord Jesus Christ. How his holy, spotless human nature must have felt, groaned, grieved under, and recoiled from the arrows of hell shot by the infernal king of darkness! How his holy soul must have shuddered at those things, which were presented to that spotless human nature which he took into union with his own divine Person! Thus, though the Lord Jesus Christ was "tempted in all points, like as we are"—so that there is not a single temptation, trial, or painful feeling which we may experience, that he has not experienced before us—yet through mercy, infinite mercy, he was "without sin;" without one spot, or speck, or tinge of the slightest evil. He stood spotless amid the darts of hell, spotless amid the temptations that were shot like hail against his holy human nature. It is this that so fitted him to become a High Priest—that he is thereby "touched with the feeling of our infirmity." When we go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and tell him how tempted we are, what a burden sin is to our soul, what snares are laid for our feet, how our mind is exercised with this and the other feeling; how we long after a deliverance from the gins, traps, and snares spread for our feet—we go not to one who knows

nothing of these things through internal experience. He was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." O what two sweet features in the blessed Jesus—perfect holiness, and yet thorough acquaintance with temptation! And how these features mutually harmonizing draw forth from time to time the affections of our soul unto him! If he were not "tempted in all points like as we are," we should not go to him with our temptations; if he were not "without sin," he could not be the great "High Priest over the house of God."

Thus we see in the Lord Jesus Christ a union of two apparently conflicting things—a perfect acquaintance with temptation in all its shapes and forms—a thorough experimental knowledge of it, the only true knowledge—and an entire exemption from sin. Do men decry experience? It is no less than taking the crown off the mediatorial brow: it is doing what is in their power to dethrone Jesus from his high priesthood. Had **He** not an experimental acquaintance with temptation? Did he look down upon temptation as something he had no acquaintance with, no experience of? something seen in theory, something beneath his feet, but which his holy soul never entered into? No: he had a personal, deep experience of it: and therefore, so far as we have a deep and personal experience of temptation, how it seems to draw forth the feelings of our soul and the affections of our heart, that, tempted as we are, we can go to him as one who has been tempted!

And, on the other hand, when we can see his spotless holiness shining through all, this very holiness of his draws forth the reverence of our soul toward him, and the tenderest affection and love of our heart. So that, just as the union of the Godhead and of the manhood in one glorious Immanuel, draws forth the affection and reverence of our soul towards him as God-Man: so the union of perfect holiness and

thorough acquaintance with temptation, draws out the sympathy and tenderness of our heart towards him, and draws forth too the sympathy and tenderness of his heart toward us.

Thus, the apostle says, "We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of **our** infirmities." Was Paul a man who knew infirmities? Yes, deeply. He tells us that he gloried in them, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. (2 Cor. 12:9) Was Paul's faith, or hope, or love ever weak? Did he feel helplessness, and mourn and sigh beneath sin? Deeply, deeply. Did he get upon some lofty pinnacle, far away from human infirmity, helplessness, and misery? No; he descended more deeply into it than you or I. Was he a man who stood apart and away from temptation, clear from "the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life?" Were the darts of hell never shot against him with infernal fury? "Tempted in all points like as **we** are." Strike out that word "we." It cannot be "**our** infirmities," if Paul had none; it cannot be "tempted like as **we** are," if Paul never was tempted. If he had stood upon some lofty spot, far away from infirmities, far away from temptation, he would have written a lie, had he said "**our** infirmities," and "tempted like as **we** are."

But Paul could look on the whole church of God, in their infirmities, and say, 'Like you, dear brethren, I am full of infirmities: I am tempted, dear brethren, as you are.' And I may say more: if we have none of these infirmities and temptations, these words will not suit us. Men may speak great swelling words about the Christ of God: but I am bold to say, they have got far away from Christ who have got far away from temptations and infirmities. It is through felt infirmity that we go to the great High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" it is through felt

temptation that we come into a personal knowledge of our divine and spiritual union with that great High Priest who was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

I would add one word more. The more we are compassed with infirmity, the more we shall come to him: and the more we are tempted, the more, as the Spirit leads us, shall we have sweet and blessed communion with him. Hard hearts, unfeeling conscience—what communion have these with such an Immanuel as the scriptures set forth? But God's poor, needy, tried, and exercised family, burdened with infirmities, and assailed with a thousand temptations, through those very infirmities and temptations come to have union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

II.—The apostle, therefore, adds, "**Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.**" Observe the word "therefore." What is the meaning of that word? It implies a connection with the preceding verses. What had been his drift in the preceding part of the text? "We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; let us"—What **us?** proud **us?** presumptuous **us?** unfeeling **us?** dead, dry, notional, Calvinistic **us?** O no; no such us as that. But **we** whose minds are exercised, **we** whose souls are labouring under burdens and difficulties, **we** who feel ourselves to be lost, ruined, undone sinners, **we** who are acquainted with the desperate evils of our fallen nature, **we** that know, painfully know, what infirmities and temptations are—"let us," none else—"let us come." Why? Because we have infirmities? because we have temptations? Not so; but because we have a great High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" because we have a great High Priest who has been "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin."

That is the foundation of the "therefore." Our infirmities, our temptations are not a sufficient warrant. We must indeed have infirmities, otherwise we cannot go to him who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" we must have temptations, or we cannot know him who has been tempted like as we are tempted. But besides this, we must have faith given us to see this great High Priest: we must have hope given us to cast anchor within the veil: we must have love given us that our heart's affection may flow forth towards him. We must therefore feel the leadings of the Spirit drawing us to his blessed feet; we must have our eyes anointed with divine eye-salve to see his beauty and glory, and our hearts touched by the blessed Spirit to feel the power of his love and blood.

Thus these two things combined—our misery and his mercy, our infirmities and help laid upon One that is mighty, our temptation and the succour he affords to us in our temptation, our wounded spirit and his tender heart—when these two things are combined and felt in our soul's experience, then we are drawn to a throne of grace. And this is the foundation of the "therefore;" the reason, the spiritual reason, why we should come, and why we do come.

1. But he says, "**boldly.**" What does that mean? Presumptuously? God forbid! Recklessly? Never let us entertain the thought. Self-righteously! Perish the supposition. In myself? No; let myself ever be a mass of ruin. What does boldness, then, imply? Holy boldness, spiritual boldness: not reckless daring, not pharisaical presumption, not self-righteous ignorance of God's perfections, and thus rushing upon the thick bosses of his buckler. But that boldness which is consistent with the deepest reverence of the holy God; that union of godly fear and spiritual

confidence which is raised up in the soul by a sense of what I am and of what Jesus is to me. "Let us come boldly," in opposition to slavish fear; "let us come boldly," in opposition to an apprehension that because he is so holy he will spurn me from his footstool. So that to come "boldly," is to come not with daring hardness, not with self-righteousness, not with ignorance; but to come under the sweet drawings of the blessed Spirit confidently, and yet not presumptuously—boldly, and yet not recklessly; the ground of our boldness being, not what we are in ourselves, but what the "great High Priest over the house of God" is to us.

2. But where are we to "come?" To "**the throne of grace.**" How much this word is used! but it is to be feared how little its sweet and solemn import is understood! Look at the words. We use words sometimes till we use them like parrots: without knowing or feeling their divine meaning. "A throne of grace!" What does it mean? Let us analyse the expression. Grace is here represented as sitting enthroned: in other words, grace as a king, as the apostle elsewhere says, "reigning through righteousness unto eternal life." Grace embodied in the Person of Immanuel is "the throne of grace." Then, where grace sits embodied in the Person of Immanuel, where grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, where grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, where grace wins the day in spite of guilt, sin and shame; where grace sits like a monarch upon his throne, swaying his sceptre over his willing subjects—**there** is "the throne of grace."

Now, look at it in this way. Perhaps you fall upon your knees before you go to bed; and call this 'going to a throne of grace,' when all the time you are upon your knees there is not one feeling in your soul that grace is reigning through righteousness to justify, pardon, and bless you. A mere

dropping upon your knee, a mere stuttering out of a few formal petitions is called 'going to a throne of grace.' So ministers will use a set of mill-horse petitions, and call it 'going to a throne of grace,' when they are ignorant what "a throne of grace" is, and never think when they run their unmeaning round of senseless words, what "a throne of grace" really and virtually means.

To come to "a throne of grace" is to come to that spot where grace reigns, where grace wields its blessed sceptre, where grace flows out of the fulness of Immanuel, as the rays of light and heat flow out of the sun—and flows into the heart of sinners to pardon their sins, heal their backslidings, save their souls, and deliver them from the bottomless pit. To come thus feelingly to "a throne of grace," how different, O how different from falling upon our knees and tumbling out a few senseless petitions with our mind's eye at the very end of the earth! To feel our souls encompassed with infirmities, assailed with a thousand temptations, and yet by faith to catch a view of the great "High Priest over the house of God;" to see and know that he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and was "tempted in all points like as we are," for the very purpose that grace might reign through righteousness, that grace might be manifested in his blood and obedience, that grace might deliver our souls from the bottomless pit, that grace might flow into our hearts and comfort our cast-down spirits, that grace might reign triumphant in us—so to come **(but O, how rarely we come so)** is really to come to "a throne of grace."

But we can only come thus when labouring under the burden of infirmities. It is my infirmities that make "the throne of grace" precious. The more temptations I have, the more grace I want: the more infirmities I feel, the more the superaboundings of grace are needful for my soul. The

connection, therefore, between my infirmities and temptations and "the throne of grace," is the closest imaginable. We come that these infirmities may be pardoned, and we strengthened under them; that we may be delivered from these temptations, and supported under them while they are working together for our spiritual good.

3. "**That we may obtain mercy.**" What "**we? We** find mercy!" Surely the apostle slipped in a wrong word here. Had he not obtained mercy? Had he not found pardon and peace? Had not the Lord Jesus been made precious to his soul? Yet he says, "that **we** may find mercy." What says Mr. Hart? "Begging mercy every hour." O yes. The man that knows he is a sinner, who feels sin deeply and daily, cannot be satisfied with having found mercy once in his life, with having once tasted the mercy of God in his soul. I will tell you those who are so satisfied—those who are **not** compassed with infirmities, those who are **not** tempted nor tried.

But those who are compassed with infirmities, who find themselves little else but one mass of infirmity, and are tempted with a thousand temptations—**their** sins are so great, **their** backslidings are so many, **their** inward iniquities and enormities are of such an aggravated cast, that they want mercy, mercy, mercy. Mercy for every unclean desire, mercy for every foolish, trifling word, mercy for every angry or unbecoming expression, mercy for every look, mercy for every thought, mercy for every prayer; and if ministers, mercy for every sermon: for sin, wretched sin, is so mingled with all we think, say, or do, that we want mercy again and again, again and again, to be manifested and revealed to our souls. But what makes us want it? and where are we to go to get it? Why, it is infirmity and temptation that make us want it, and we must go to "a throne of grace" to obtain it. When then we can look to Jesus, see him with

mercy in his hands and love in his heart, find his glorious grace triumphant over a thousand sins and backslidings, reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, and rising with its mighty tide over all the workings of our filthy nature, and receive it into our hearts—this is going to "a throne of grace that we may obtain mercy."

4. And not only "obtain mercy," but to **"find grace to help in time of need."** What! had not the apostle got beyond "time of need?" Surely he must have learnt his lesson very imperfectly. Had he not the 'five points' all well established in his creed? O yes; but he had his "time of need." And how often was that? Once a year? once in two years? or once in ten years? I am bold to say, that his "time of need" never outstretched a day. I should not go too far, if I were to say his "time of need" never outstretched an hour. What is a "time of need?" Every time that we feel infirmity, every time that we are exercised with temptation. If I feel my infirmities, and know I shall be carried away by them unless grace prevent; if I have temptations, and find they will swallow me up unless grace be in counteraction to overcome them, and deliver me from them, it will be with me "a time of need." So that, the more I am encompassed with infirmities, and the more I feel the weight and power of temptation, the more multiplied my "times of need" are.

But is not this drawing a vast revenue of grace out of Christ Jesus? Those whose "times of need" are very rare do not want much grace. If they have very few infirmities and very few temptations, it is a contradiction in terms to say they want "grace to help." But in proportion to the multiplication of our infirmities, and in proportion to the multiplication of our temptations, will be our want of "grace to help in time of need."

So that would we prize, deeply prize, the sweetness of mercy, we must walk in the midst of infirmity, and be compassed with temptation. Would we find grace, the sweetness of grace, the power of grace, the blessedness of grace, we must have "times of need," in order to bring us to "a throne of grace." Are there not **(to our shame be it spoken)** many times when we seem to need nothing? No exercises of soul, no temptations, no trials, no inward going out of the heart after the things of God? When there are these seasons **(and they are too, too many)** there is no going to "a throne of grace." therefore, there is no "obtaining mercy," no "finding grace to help in time of need." But, on the other hand, when we are compassed with infirmities, exercised with temptations, these are "times of need." Here is a snare I shall fall into, if grace do not prevent: there is a temptation that will carry me away, if grace do not help; here are my sins opening their jaws to swallow me up, if grace do not save me; Satan is alluring me in a thousand forms, and grace alone can deliver me from his wiles. So that I draw forth grace out of the compassionate High Priest, just in proportion to my spiritual knowledge of infirmities, and my spiritual acquaintance with temptation in its various shapes and forms.

Who, then, are the people who really know Jesus, and have union with him? The proud, presumptuous, unexercised, light, trifling, hard-hearted, dry Calvinists, with a clear, well-defined scheme in their head, but as devoid of grace as the white of an egg is of taste? No; they may talk about Jesus with great swelling words. Christ may be first, Christ may be last, and Christ may be their whole theme; yet an unknown Christ, an unfelt Christ, an unapplied Christ, an unenjoyed Christ; because it is through infirmities alone that we can have fellowship with him who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and it is through temptation alone we come

to know him who was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." But would not you, many a time, have for ever done with infirmities, your greatest plague, and with temptation, your sorest pain? Would he not be your greatest friend who would take away all your infirmities, and keep temptation from ever coming into your soul? Your friend, your friend! And have you not thought sometimes you would get under such a ministry, where infirmities and temptations were never touched upon? Your friend, your friend!—your greatest enemy, your greatest enemy!

Take away infirmities, take away temptation, and you take away coming to "the throne of grace:" you take away sweet union to the great High Priest who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmity." Take away your trials, your afflictions, your various inward exercises, and you take away prayer out of your soul, sighing and groaning to the Lord, breathing after his presence within, and sweet communion with him. Take away your infirmities and your temptations, and you take away a good part of your religion. Not that religion consists in these things; but the comings in of the mercy and grace of God are so blended with infirmities and temptations, that if you take away the one, you take away the other.

Now do we not see a little of the sweet connection of our text? Here we have the great "High Priest over the house of God," "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin;" and though we are thus infirm, and thus tempted, the Holy Ghost invites and bids us, and at times sweetly draws us, to come to this "throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." So that, while on the one hand, there is every encouragement for the poor, needy, helpless, tried, and tempted, there is not the shadow of a

shade of encouragement for those who are at ease in Zion, and have a name to live while dead.

The Lord encourage us from time to time who know these things in our soul's experience to come to "a throne of grace." Though separated in body, we can meet there in spirit. And sure I am, from personal experience, the more we know of these infirmities and temptations, the more we shall go to "a throne of grace." And when from time to time we "obtain mercy and find grace to help," we can bless the Lord God Almighty that ever there should be such "a throne of grace," and such a merciful, loving, compassionate High Priest seated upon it, to comfort, save, and bless our never-dying souls.