

## A MERCIFUL AND SYMPATHIZING HIGH PRIEST

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"Therefore in all things it behooved 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. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to support those who are tempted." [Heb 2:17-18](#)

We have in the book of Genesis a brief, but a very beautiful account of the sacred communion which existed between God and man in the garden of Eden, when man stood before his Maker in all the purity and uprightness of his native innocence. Sin and death had not yet invaded Paradise; and thus without any infringement of his dignity or glory God could, as he was used, come down to commune with man in the cool of the day when all nature was hushed in calm. Being then without sin or shame, unconscious of evil and of its inseparable companion, guilty fear, man held with his Maker the sweetest communion which a finite creature could enjoy with his Creator.

The foundation of this communion was, however, not so much man's native innocence, as that God had created him "in his own image, after his likeness." This likeness to God consisted mainly in four things-

First, *in the immortality of man's soul*; for we read, that though God formed man's body out of the dust of the earth, he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Thus while his body was earthy, for "the first man was of the earth, earthy," [{1Co 15:47}](#) his soul was heavenly-breathed into him from the very mouth of God, and thus immortal. The immortality of man's soul is thus a reflex image of the everlasting existence of God.

Secondly, as created in God's *moral image*, which is righteousness and truth, purity and love.

Thirdly, as created in what I may perhaps call God's *intellectual image*; that is, made capable of thought, reason, memory, reflection, and discourse.

And fourthly, as created in what I may term God's *anticipated* or future image, for as the Son of God was in due time to assume a perfect human body and a perfect human soul, the body and soul which Adam wore were a representation beforehand of the nature which the Lord Jesus Christ would afterwards assume into union with his own divine Person.

When God then had thus created man in his own image, after his likeness, he placed him in Paradise, in a garden which he had planted with his own hand for man's recreation and delight. There he caused every tree that was pleasant to the sight to spring up, and every tree that was good for food; so that man could look round and not only see himself the object of God's bounty, but could enjoy everything which his nature was capable of as adapted to that state of innocence and happiness. The beautiful trees and shrubs of that

fair Paradise gladdened his eyes; the murmuring river charmed his ears; the cool shade refreshed his spirits; the sweet fruits delighted his palate and nourished his frame; and, above all, communion with God enlarged, expanded, and fed his soul.

But, alas! how soon a dark and gloomy cloud, fraught with destruction and death, came over this beautiful scene! How soon, by the permission indeed of God, but through the craft and malice of Satan, sin invaded this Paradise-this garden of God! And what was the consequence? I need not take up your time and attention this morning by enlarging upon the fall and its dreadful consequences. I will name but two, which became at once and immediately manifest-guilt and shame. Man no longer came forth as before to meet his God. He shrank from his sacred, and now for the first time dreadful, presence. He knew that he had wilfully and deliberately, not deceived as the woman, but with his eyes open, [{1Ti 2:14}](#) broken and trampled upon the express prohibition of God. He therefore sought to hide himself, with his guilty partner, amid the trees of the garden.

But could the trees, however dense, hide him from the heart-searching eye of God? Could the leafy foliage give him shelter from the hand that had made, and could now with equal ease destroy him? Ah, no. He was called forth, and he came full of shame, guilt, and confusion into the presence of his justly offended Judge to hear his expected sentence of death. *That*, however, in a moral sense had already taken place and could not be reversed; for "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent." He had said, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die." And thus he had already morally died.

But though he spared his forfeited natural life, yet to show his righteous wrath he cursed the very ground for his sake, declaring that "in sorrow he should eat of it all the days of his life," and should return unto that dust out of which he had been originally taken. Still with the curse he gave a blessing, for then and there, in the very garden where man sinned and fell, the Lord bestowed upon the woman that gracious promise which contained, as it were, in its bosom the germ of all future promises concerning the Messiah-that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head."

By this promise, full of truth and grace, God revealed to the Church that most blessed truth, that his own Son would in due time come into the world, assume of the seed of the woman, the flesh and blood of the children, in order that he might die, and by dying destroy "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," who by his subtlety had brought in such a flood of sin and woe; and not only so, but save thereby an innumerable multitude of sinners then in the loins of Adam.

But, besides this promise, the gracious Lord instituted at the same time the rite of sacrifice, as a standing type of the atonement which in due time was to be made by the Son of his love; for we read that "he made coats of skins" and clothed therewith our first parents, which no doubt were the skins of the sacrifices then offered by Adam, and a representation of that imputed righteousness clothed in which alone they could stand without spot or blemish in his sight. In consequence then of, and ever since the fall, man has never been able to stand before God except through a mediator. Sin thoroughly and effectually broke

off that communion of which I have spoken as existing between God and man in the days of his native innocence; and now man can no longer approach his Maker, at least with any hope of acceptance, any true faith, or any holy confidence, except through the mediator of God's own choice and appointment. Thus we see the necessity that there should be a high priest over the house of God, who in the days of his flesh offered for sin an availing sacrifice, and now lives at God's right hand, not only to intercede for the heirs of promise, but to make his love, blood, and grace experimentally and effectually known to their hearts.

Those thoughts may serve as an introduction to the subject before us, where we have mention made of the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the benefits and blessings which spring out of it. The text contains a deep mine of heavenly truth, which at the best I can but imperfectly handle; but, looking up to the Lord for his help and blessing, I shall-

*I First*, endeavor to bring before you *the nature and necessity* of the great High Priest over the house of God.

*II Secondly*, how God the Father *chose and qualified the Son of his love* to undertake this important work, and to become this great and glorious High Priest.

*III Thirdly*, what are the four *qualifications* of which our text speaks. The first is, "to *make reconciliation* for the sins of the people." The second, to be a "*faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.*" The third, to be "*merciful.*" And the fourth, to be *sympathizing*- "for in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to support them those who are tempted." I *The nature and necessity of the great High Priest over the house of God.* If there were no sin we may safely assume there would be no need of a sacrifice, or of a high priest to offer it. The very circumstance that what the apostle calls "the blood of bulls and of goats" was necessary under the law was in itself a standing representation of the necessity of a sacrifice being offered for sin. But the rite of sacrifice was only a representation, deriving all its value from God's appointment; for as the apostle argues, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." But its object was to teach the ancient church by daily and visible sign and figure that no sinner, as a sinner, can approach unto God except through atoning blood.

Nor can any one now draw near unto him who, in his purity, justice, and holiness, is a consuming fire, except through a Mediator; for the Lord himself has said "No man comes unto the Father but by me;" {[Joh 14:6](#)} and the Holy Spirit expressly declares that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." {[1Ti 2:5](#)} Now it is absolutely necessary that this Mediator should be such a one as can effectually and acceptably mediate between the two opposing parties. He must therefore possess in himself sufficient dignity, worth, and glory in the eyes of God to stand near and commune face to face with him; and yet he must partake of the nature of those for whom he mediates that he may have a follow-feeling with them. As Job beautifully speaks, he must be an arbitrator that can lay his hand upon them both.

But where can such a one be discovered? If God had looked round (so to speak) the courts of heaven, to see whom he could find adequate to sustain this mighty office, where could he be found? What created being, however highly exalted, what holy angel, what burning seraph, in a word, who among the hierarchy of heaven could have ventured to approach unto God, to intercede for man's guilty race, or to mediate between the justice of God and their deserved doom? Who among the morning stars that had sung together, or of all the sons of God who had shouted for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid, {[Job 38:7](#)} could offer to bear up a sinking world, when, by the shock of the fall, "all the foundations of the earth were out of course?"

Surely only he, who, when "the earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved" can say, "I bear up the pillars of it.;" {[Ps 75:3](#)} surely none but the Son of God had sufficient dignity, weight, power, or influence to come forward to undertake so mighty a task. For what created being, however pure, high, or holy, could approach the Majesty of heaven, to offer an obedience available for others, when God could claim from him as a creature the whole? None, none but the Son of God. God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, his "fellow," as he calls him by the mouth of the prophet, could stand forward with sufficient dignity and glory to empower him to undertake such an office as to mediate between God and men.

Let this then be fixed as a firm foundation of our most holy faith, that it is the eternal possession of this divine nature as the Son that qualified the Lord Jesus to mediate between God and us. If this foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do? We must never, therefore, let it go, for it is our very life. Being his only begotten Son, and therefore of the same glory and power, he can as equal with the Father stand up in our name before him, when the angels must veil their faces. In his hands the glory of the Father is safe. All the perfections of Godhead shine forth in him, who is the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his Person, and these, therefore, can suffer no tarnish or diminishing in or by him.

And as loved by the Father with an everlasting love, he is able to plead with him as one who loves God and as one whom God loves. The Deity and Sonship, therefore, of our great and glorious high priest are essential to his sustaining such a character as the Mediator between God and men; for you know that mediation is an essential feature of the priestly office, as Aaron showed when he took a censer at the command of Moses, and ran into the midst of the congregation, and offered incense for the people. Take away the Deity and Sonship of our great high priest, and you blot the Sun of righteousness out of the sky. The light of the church is gone and darkness covers the scene-that darkness which is the pledge and forerunner of the blackness of darkness forever.

But again-he must be of the same nature as those for whom he mediates. The apostle speaks very blessedly on this point in the chapter before us-"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." And again-"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." Had he died for angels, he must have taken angelic nature. As he died for men, he must take human nature. This is the sum of the apostle's argument, and most conclusive it is.

Thus by virtue of his essential deity and Sonship, he was able to mediate with God; and as taking our nature into union with his own divine Person, he was able to mediate with man. Being as his eternal, only-begotten Son, "in the form of God, he thought it not robbery," that is, an unhallowed, an unallowed claim, "to be equal with God;" {[Php 2:6](#)} and by taking upon him the form of a servant and "being made in the likeness of men," he became man's friend and man's brother. The words of our text are very expressive upon this point- "In all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren."

He was made in all things like unto his brethren; and yet in many things he was very unlike them. The apostle, therefore, does not say he was made *as* his brethren, but *like* unto them, as he speaks elsewhere of his being "in the likeness of sinful flesh;" {[Ro 8:3](#)} and yet we know that it was not sinful flesh, for if his flesh had been sinful he could not have been "a lamb without blemish and without spot." Likeness is not the same thing as identity. A person may be like me, and yet not be altogether as I. Here, then, lies the main difference between him and us as regards his humanity, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not assume a fallen, but an unfallen nature. There was in that pure flesh which he assumed in the womb of the Virgin not only no sin, but no liability to, no possibility of it; there was in it no mortality, no sickness; no seeds of disease or death. It was the nature of Adam before he fell- not the nature of Adam after the fall; and yet differing from the nature of Adam in this, that it could not fall as Adam did, not being a person like him, but taken as "a holy one" into union with the person of the Son of God at the very instant of its conception under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

Our blessed Lord never was 'in Adam'; for had he been, he must have fallen with him, and been a partaker with the whole human race in his guilt and crime. Thus the apostle makes a distinction between Adam and the Lord Jesus; the distinction being that Adam was our natural, federal head, but the Lord Jesus Christ our new Covenant Head. Therefore he says- "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all," that is, all the elect of God, "be made alive." And again, "The first man Adam was made a living soul; and the last man Adam was made a quickening spirit." And to show us more clearly still the difference between the two covenant heads, he adds, "Howbeit that was not first, which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterwards that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." {[1Co 15:22,45,47](#)}

Here the Lord Jesus Christ, as our new covenant head, is set in opposition to Adam, our natural, federal head, Adam being, at the very best, in his first creation, but "a living soul," the Lord Jesus, as the divine giver of spiritual and eternal life, "a life-giving spirit;" Adam being earthy, as formed out of the dust of the earth, and the Lord being heavenly, not only as coming down thence, but as assuming a nature which was of heavenly birth and origin, as produced not by natural generation but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus though the blessed Lord was "in all things made like unto his brethren," yet he took into union with his own divine Person, not a fallen, frail, and peccable human nature, such as is theirs; but a nature pure and unfallen; and though conceived in the womb of a sinful woman and made of her flesh, yet as being produced, by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, of her substance, it was formed and brought forth without the least taint of sin, sickness, or

mortality. And yet, with this exception, "in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren."

He had a body like theirs; he had a soul like theirs; a body of flesh and bones and blood; a soul that could reason and think and feel; believe, hope, and love; suffer and rejoice; be sorrowful even unto death; be grieved for the hardness of men's hearts; and have compassion for the weariness and faintness of a famishing multitude. In partaking, then, of the nature of the children, he partook of all its sinless infirmities. Do they hunger? So he hungered, as in the wilderness and at the barren fig tree {[Mt 4:2](#); [21:18-19](#)} Do they thirst? So he thirsted, when on the cross he cried aloud, "I thirst." {[Joh 19:28](#)} Do they suffer weariness? So did he, as at Samaria's well. Do they sleep? So did he, for he was "asleep on a pillow" when the ship was in danger from the waves. At the grave of Lazarus he "groaned in the spirit, was troubled, and wept;" before he opened the deaf man's ears, "he looked up to heaven and sighed;" and in the garden he prayed, and agonized, and sweat great drops of blood. Thus, in all their sorrows and sufferings, he was made like unto his brethren; and we may well suppose that his holy body and soul, not being like ours blunted and hardened by the fall, not only felt more keenly the sufferings of our common humanity, but were pained more readily by them, and suffered more exquisitely from them.

What heart can conceive, or tongue express, the infinite depths of the Redeemer's condescension in thus being made like unto his brethren-that the Son of God should assume a finite nature, subject to the sinless infirmities necessarily connected with a time state and a dwelling on earth; that he should leave the bosom of his Father in which he had lain before all worlds, and should consent to become an inhabitant of this world of tears; to breathe earthly air; to eat human food; to associate with human beings; to be an eye-witness of, and himself share in human sorrows; to have before his eyes the daily spectacle of human sins; to be banished so long from his native home; to endure hunger, weariness, and thirst; to be subject to the persecution of men, the flight of all his disciples, and the treachery of one among them whose hand had been with him on the table; not to hide his face from shame and spitting, but to be mocked, struck, buffeted, and scourged, and at last to die an agonizing death between two malefactors, amid scorn and infamy, and covered, as men thought, with everlasting confusion and disgrace! O, what infinite condescension and mercy are displayed in these sufferings and sorrows of an incarnate God! The Lord give us faith to look to him as suffering them for our sake! II But I pass on to show how God chose and qualified him for the work which, according to the eternal purpose and counsel of the three-one Jehovah, he undertook to perform. He did not assume this office himself unchosen, uncovenanted, unqualified, for "no man takes this honor to himself, but he whom is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be a high priest; but he that said unto him, You are my Son, today have I begotten you." {[Heb 5:4-5](#)} He was chosen from all eternity for this special work. We therefore read-"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights." {[Isa 42:1](#)} He is the "living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious." {[1Pe 2:4](#)} And why did God choose him for the work but because he was so eminently qualified to sustain it? there being no other in heaven or earth, who was in a position to undertake the work, or who had power to carry it through. For not only his eternal Deity, but his being made like unto his brethren, adapted him in every way to be such a high priest as they needed.

A bleeding sacrifice had to be offered. God as God could not do this. The divine nature is not susceptible of suffering. Deity cannot bleed or die. And yet atonement must be made. The demands of justice must be paid. The law could not be broken with impunity. The perfections of God jarred, and needed to be reconciled; so that, though God, as God, could not suffer, bleed, die, or offer sacrifice, yet it was needful that one who was God should do all this. A sacrifice that an angel might offer would not be meritorious, would possess in it no efficacy for the work of atonement.

Angelic shoulders could not bear the crushing weight of imputed sin. If they rendered to God a pure and holy obedience, it was what he could claim justly at their hands. If a seraph burned before the throne of God in flames of seraphic love, it was no more than he could demand as having created him a burning seraph. If the highest angel flew upon his swiftest pinions to obey God's commands-be it to smite the host of Sennacherib, or convey Lazarus to Abraham's bosom-he would be doing that which God could justly require at his hands. He had no excess obedience to offer; there was no meritorious task of which he could say to God "This I do over and above what I am required to do. Accept this at my hands for guilty man, and impute it to him for righteousness." The highest angel could not use such language before the throne of the Most High.

But the eternal Son of God could use such language. Therefore God the Father chose him for the work in his own eternal mind, and prepared for him a body in and by which he could execute it-as we read-"A body have you prepared me." [{Heb 10:5}](#) By this body we are to understand the whole of his pure humanity, for the expression takes in not only his body but his soul, which, we know, had a large part in the work of redemption; for we read, not only of the precious blood which his body shed, but of his seeing "of the travail of his soul." [{Isa 53:11}](#)

When, then, the blessed Lord had been chosen of his Father to do this important work he gladly and willingly accepted the office. His heart burned with love to the children of men; for even in eternity, when he was by his Father "as one brought up with him, and was daily his delight rejoicing always before him;" even then "he rejoiced in the habitable part of his earth; and his delights were with the sons of men." [{Pr 8:30-31}](#) His bride, the Church, was then presented to him by his heavenly Father, and he betrothed her forever to himself; yes "he betrothed her in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." [{Ho 2:19}](#) So that she became his Hephzibah, for his delight was in her. [{Isa 62:4}](#)

And his heart shrank not from the task, nor from the suffering however great. He cheerfully consented to accept the task, to finish the work which the Father gave him to do; and though he could only do it by sacrificing himself, yet so full was his heart of love and pity, that he said to his heavenly Father, "Lo, I come to do your will; your law is in my heart." Thus Deity and humanity, love to God and love to man, zeal for God's glory and pity and compassion for the wants and woes of the objects to be redeemed, with strength to suffer and power to save, all met and met alone in the person of Immanuel; and thus was he qualified to be such a High Priest as could glorify God, and rescue his people from the depths of the fall. III But let us now consider the four important particulars, by which the Lord Jesus Christ was so eminently and specially qualified, to be the great high priest over

the house of God. 1. The first qualification which I named was to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. We can form little idea in our minds of what sin is as viewed by the eyes of an infinitely pure and holy God. There may be times and seasons in our breasts when our conscience is made tender in God's fear, and sin lies hard and heavy as a burden which we can scarcely bear. At such seasons we may have some feeble, faint conception of what sin is as viewed by the eyes of infinite purity. If ever, too, we have seen by faith the darling Son of God groaning and agonizing in Gethsemane, or suffering and bleeding upon the cross, we may have felt with grieved heart and weeping eyes what sin must be to cause him such sorrows. But these are with most believers but few and favored moments. For the most part, we breathe such an atmosphere of sin that we scarcely feel the evil that surrounds us without or dwells with us within. In this we are like a person who has spent the night in a small and confined bedroom-he is not aware while he is in it of the closeness of the apartment; but let him go forth in the summer's early morn into the pure and clear air, and then return to his apartment of which the window has been kept down, how sensible is he at once of its close atmosphere, and he wonders how he could have slept and risen without perceiving it. So we naturally breathe such an atmosphere of sin, that we have, as it were, become insensible to it.

I have understood that people who are afflicted with fever, smallpox, and other diseases most offensive to all who attend them, are themselves almost insensible to the reeking smell of the room in which they lie, and of which they are themselves the cause; so man, eaten up by the cancer of sin, fevered with every raging lust, covered with the loathsome leprosy of evil breaking forth in every part, though a monster in the sight of a holy God, is insensible to his own filth and foulness; it being the very nature of man to deceive himself, and not see sin as God sees it. But when light from above enters into our mind, and life with light, and we begin to see and feel what sin is, as committed against a God so pure and bright and holy-what a dreadful thing it is to have broken his law as we have done again and again; what a terrible curse is entailed on those who do break it; what an opening hell awaits those who die without pardon and reconciliation to a justly offended God-then we begin feebly and faintly to have some conception of what sin is in the eyes of a holy and pure Jehovah.

Before we feel this, we cannot enter into the nature and necessity of a high priest like Jesus Christ; we cannot understand why it should have been necessary for the Son of God to come down to earth to bleed and to die. We think that sin might surely have been wiped off at a cheaper rate; that tears and prayers, and alms-deeds, and repentance, and sacraments, and good works of various kinds, surely might have been put into the opposite scale. We cannot and do not naturally think that sin is so evil a thing as God declares it is. We are like Lord Nelson, who said almost in his dying moments, "I have not been a great sinner, Hardy;" though he had forsaken his own wife and lived in adultery for years. I have named it with reluctance, and merely to show how sin so blinds the mind and sears the conscience, that a brave, noble-hearted man, the idol of his country, may live in open infringement of the laws of God and man, and yet lull himself in a dying hour with the thought that he has not been so great a sinner as many others.



**But when God comes near to judgment he searches the heart, tries the thoughts, lays guilt upon the conscience as a load grievous to be borne, pierces and wounds the soul with the stings of guilt and remorse, that he may thus bring it down to his feet to cry for mercy. It is cutting, killing work, but love and grace are wrapped up in it; for when the soul is ready to sink under the intolerable load of sin, then is the usual time that faith is given to view the bleeding God-Man as revealed to the heart by the power of God. By this teaching we experimentally learn, how needful it was that Godhead should have been united to manhood in the Person of Christ, for we see and feel that nothing short of blood divine can wash away sins of so deep a dye, of so aggravated a stamp, of so black a hue, as we feel ours to be.**

**No man can have a light view of sin who has seen it either as reflected in a holy law, or in the sufferings of Immanuel, God with us. When then we have been feelingly exercised with a sight and sense of our dreadful sins against a holy and just God, and I may add, against the sufferings and sorrows of his incarnate Son, we begin to see a little into the meaning of the words, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," that is, to atone for them. And yet, with all our exercises, guilt, or distress, we really learn but little of what sin is, as God sees it. But whether we learn little or much, it is a lesson which we must be taught in our own bosom. It is indeed a lesson that is passed over by many who stand high in a profession of religion; but it is one that must be learned sooner or later by every saved soul.**

**A man never becomes a scholar-I mean a true scholar in the school of Christ-if he passes over the rudiments. He is in grace, what some people are in nature-they have never learned the elements of the language or science which they profess to know; they have been imperfectly taught; they passed over the rudiments through idleness or bad teaching, and were pushed on into a higher class before they had mastered the first principles; and therefore during all the rest of their lives they never know any one language or any one science truly and perfectly. Or, to use another figure, they resemble a building reared upon a sandy soil, which has no firm or solid foundation, because that which should have been rock is but sand. Thus, if a man is not well grounded in the beginning of religion, he cannot be expected to have a middle or an end of any worth or value.**

**It is a great thing then to begin right. It is a great thing to have a good, solid, and deep foundation laid in the heart and conscience by the hand of God at the first setting out. As the Lord himself says, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." {[La 3:27](#)} It is a good thing for God to begin with us before we begin with God; for God to give us religion before we profess it; for God to take us in hand before we take the truth of God in hand; and for the Lord to work by his own grace in our heart before we speak of that grace, or take that great and holy name into our lips. But when we are exercised by the hand of God bringing us to the light, and thus by seeing light in his light, come to learn, at least in some measure, what sin really and truly is, our eyes get opened, which before were closed, to see also the necessity and nature of a priesthood like that of Jesus, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people;" for we feel these two things, that we ourselves as sinners need to be reconciled to God, and that this reconciliation can only be made by one who is able to effect it.**

Have you then ever seen an angry God; ever felt his wrath in your conscience; ever trembled at the judgment to come, and feared what your dreadful doom will certainly be, unless he be pleased to have mercy in a sovereign and most undeserved way upon your soul? It is impossible to say how many veils are taken off the heart, how many false refuges are hurled to the ground, and how much self-deception and self-righteousness are broken up by a discovery of sin to a guilty conscience and by some manifestation of a sin-avenging God. This the Lord speaks of by his prophet as done by himself. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet." *He* lays it and not *we*; for if *we* laid it, we would hold the line wrong, and tamper with the plummet. And what is the consequence of his laying it, or rather what next follows? "And the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." {[Isa 28:17](#)}

As, then, the refuge of lies is swept away and the hiding-place overflowed, we feel a need of a truer refuge and of a safer hiding-place. And when our eyes are graciously opened to see that a reconciliation has been already made by the blood of the Lamb, we desire to have a saving interest in that precious blood. We see with believing eyes that atoning blood has been shed, a sacrifice offered, an obedience rendered, and that through this a guilty sinner may be freely pardoned, accepted, and saved.

But still our life may hang in doubt. We may believe that there is *a* Savior, without believing that he is *our* Savior. We may see the atoning blood at a distance, without having it sprinkled upon our heart; we may hear of pardon without enjoying it; may read of salvation without experiencing it; may view the sympathy and compassion and love of Jesus, and yet be strangers to them all in joyful experience.

But in every quickened soul there is a yearning for reconciliation to God. He cannot bear to live at enmity with him. He has been an enemy of God long enough. Sufficient has been the time he has spent in things that God abhors. He desires to be experimentally reconciled, pardoned, and accepted, and to feel that God is his Father and his friend. Now Jesus has "made reconciliation for the sins of the people" that are thus taught and exercised; but only as this reconciliation comes into their conscience are they feelingly and experimentally reconciled to God. For bear in mind, that reconciliation in scripture has two aspects—there is a reconciliation of our persons, and a reconciliation of our hearts and consciences. The apostle says, "We pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God." {[2Co 5:20](#)} He does not there speak as if their persons had not been already reconciled by the blood of the atonement; nor as if they were enemies, who needed to be brought near by the blood of the Lamb; but he desires that they, in their own soul, by receiving the atonement, by experiencing the pardoning love of God, by knowing the blood of sprinkling for themselves, might be inwardly and spiritually reconciled to God by receiving the sentence of justification in their own hearts. A man may view the atoning sacrifice at a distance, but this is not enough; it must be brought near. He may see the atoning blood as an Egyptian might see the blood of the Paschal lamb sprinkled upon the lintel and side-posts of the children of Israel; but it was upon the door of the true Israelite. The Holy Spirit must apply it for us and to us, and when we know the blood of sprinkling savingly by his application of it, we not only know that the Lord Jesus Christ has "made reconciliation for the sins of the people," but has also personally reconciled us unto God. 2. But a second qualification

named in our text is faithfulness; that he should be a "faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." Faithfulness, we know, is an indispensable requisite to the right discharge of every undertaken office. It is required in stewards, we read, "that a man be found faithful." {[1Co 4:2](#)} If, for instance, you are a man of property or business, and employ any person either himself to do or to overlook others in doing what requires care or skill, you naturally expect him to be faithful in what he undertakes. He requires indeed a certain degree of intelligence and skill to know what he is about, and to superintend others; but you require not merely ability, but faithfulness, uprightness, honesty, and integrity of heart and hand; and this not by fits and starts, but unwavering and undeviating. So God required not only one who was able and willing to become his servant to do the work appointed, but one who would be faithful in the execution of it. Jesus is that faithful one, according to the ancient promise, "I will raise up a faithful priest that shall do according to that which is in my heart and in my mind." {[1Sa 2:35](#)} "Righteousness was to be the belt of his loins and faithfulness the belt of his thoughts" {[Isa 11:5](#)} and thus he was faithful to him that appointed him; not merely as Moses as a servant in the house, but as a Son over his our house. {[Heb 3:2,6](#)}

O the faithfulness of Jesus! How implicitly can we rely upon it. How can he be otherwise than faithful? Is he not the true God? Has he not in himself all the perfections of Godhead? And are not truth and faithfulness among the glorious perfections, not only of his divine, but of his human nature? Faithfulness to his Father as his only begotten Son; faithfulness to his covenant engagements; faithfulness to his assumed office as the Father's servant; faithfulness to the Bride whom he had betrothed to himself; faithfulness to every promise, rite, type, sacrifice, and prophecy which foreshadowed him; faithfulness unbending to every temptation, unbroken by any violence; how needful, how indispensable, and yet how great and glorious is this faithfulness of our great High Priest!

Knowing this faithfulness, God entrusted to him his own glory. He committed not only the care of the Church, with the salvation of all the elect, into his sacred hands; but he entrusted him with what was dearer to him and nearer still-his own glory. Therefore, Jesus could say at the end of his mission, "I have glorified you on the earth; I have finished the work which you gave me to do;" {[Joh 17:4](#)} which was not only to save the Church, but to glorify the Father by his obedience unto death. God gave the persons of the elect into the hands of his dear Son, as Jacob committed Benjamin into the hands of Judah; and as Judah accepted Benjamin, so Christ accepted the Church and undertook to bring it unto God, or he himself would bear the blame forever. But how this faithfulness was tried! Men tried it; devils tried it; God tried it; but it came gloriously through all. Yet what loads were laid upon it! How the very knees of Jesus, so to speak, staggered beneath it! How, as Hart says, he had "Strength enough and none to spare?"

How he had to sustain the curse of the law and the load of imputed sin! How he had to drink up a very hell of inward torment! How he had to be agonized in body and more than agonized in soul! What bloody sweat in the garden, what tears, what painful amazement, what heaviness of spirit, what sorrowfulness even unto death; what pangs of body upon the cross, what grief of mind, what distress of soul, did the holy Lamb endure in being faithful unto God! How he might have prayed, and his Father would have sent him twelve legions

of angels! He had but to speak, and he might have soared to heaven and left the cross and all its shame and suffering behind. But he was faithful to God and to the work which he had undertaken. Six weary hours he hung upon the cross. Six weary hours he endured the wrath of God, and that most cutting stroke of all, reserved to the last as the bitterest drop in the whole cup, the hiding of his Father's countenance, which wrung from his bosom that cry such as neither earth nor heaven had heard before-"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And yet not until he had finished the work did he give up the spirit. So he was faithful "in all things pertaining to God."

And he is faithful, too, in all things pertaining to man. He could say to the Father, "Of all whom you have given me"-save the son of perdition, Judas-he had no charge to save him from death and hell; but of all the others of whom he had received as his Father's gift, he could say "I have lost none." Thus he was faithful while he was on earth.

And how faithful he is now! The High Priest under the law had two offices to execute-he had to offer sacrifice for the people, and to offer prayer and intercession for them. Upon earth Jesus fulfilled the first; in heaven he fulfils the second, as there making by virtue of his presence continual intercession for us. 3. But he is a merciful high priest, which is the third qualification the apostle mentions. And how suitable this is for us! We need a high priest, not merely one who offered a sacrifice upon the cross; not merely one who died and rose again; but one who now lives at the right hand of God on our behalf; and one of that tender, merciful, and compassionate heart with whom we can carry on from time to time sacred communion; whom we can view with believing eyes as suitable to our case, and compassionating our wants and woes; in whom we can hope with expecting hearts, as one who will not turn away from us; and whom we can love, not only for his intrinsic beauty and blessedness, but as full of pity towards us. If I may use the expression, we need not a dead but a living, not an absent but a present; not a once but a now Jesus; we want a friend at the right hand of God at the present moment; an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and yet a compassionate and loving Mediator between God and us; an interceding High Priest, Surety, and Representative in our nature in the courts of heaven, who can show mercy and compassion to us now upon Earth"whose heart is touched with tenderness, Whose affections melt with love."

Our needs make us feel this. Our sins and sorrows give us perpetual errands to the throne. This valley of tears is ever before our eyes, and thorns and briars are perpetually springing up in it that rip and tear our flesh. We need a real friend. Have you not sometimes tossed to and fro upon your weary couch, and almost cried aloud, "O that I had a friend!" You may have received cruel blows from one whom you regarded as a real friend-but you have been cruelly deceived. You feel now you have no one to take care of you or love you, and whom you can love again; and your heart sighs for a friend who shall be a friend indeed. The widow, the orphan, the friendless, the deserted one, all keenly and deeply feel this. But if grace has touched your heart, you feel that though all men forsake you, there is the friend of sinners, a brother born for adversity, a friend who loves at all times, who will never leave or forsake you. And how it cheers the troubled mind and supports the weary spirit to feel that there is a friend to whom we may go; whose eyes are ever open to see; whose ears are

ever unclosed to hear; whose heart is ever touched with a feeling of pity and compassion towards us.

But we need this friend to be almighty, for no other can suit our case—he must be a divine friend. For who but God can see us wherever we are? What but a divine eye can read our thoughts? What but a divine ear can hear our petitions? And what but a divine hand can stretch itself forth and deliver? Thus the Deity of Christ is no dry, barren speculation, no mere Bible truth, but an experience wrought powerfully into a believer's inmost soul. Happy soul! happy season! when you can say with the Church, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." {[Song 5:16](#)} Thus the very wants of the soul instinctively teach us that a friend, to be a friend, must be a heavenly friend; that his heart and hand must be divine, or they are not the heart and hand for us. This friend, whose bitterest reproach on earth that he "was the friend of sinners," is his highest glory in heaven, is the blessed Jesus, our great high priest in the courts above. We find him at times to be very merciful, very pitiful, and very compassionate. And I am sure that we need all the compassion of his loving breast; for we are continually in states of mind when nothing but his pure mercy can suit, when nothing but his rich and boundless compassion is adapted to our case. 4. But there is one more qualification in our great high priest, the fourth and last remaining to be noticed; which is—sympathy. This is opened up very sweetly in the last verse of our text—"For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to support them that are tempted." You are tempted, are you not? Is not sin ever at work in your carnal mind? Are not snares every day spread in your path? Can you leave your home for the business of the day without finding traps and snares at every step to entangle your feet? Can you eat, drink, or sleep; speak or keep silence; read, or think, or pray; be at home or abroad, in the church or in the world, without meeting some temptation to evil? Does not the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life start up at every corner, and present continual occasions of temptation? Who can deliver you out of temptation; the guilt produced by it; the sorrow it occasions; the shame, confusion, darkness, and bondage which it creates?

Surely, none but the friend of sinners, whose blood cleanses from all sin. He alone is able to support those who are tempted. But you need one who can sympathize as well as support. We often are in states when we need sympathy. But who can sympathize with us in trouble but those who are or have been in similar trouble? The rich cannot sympathize with the poor; the healthy with the sick; the strong with the weak; the Pharisee with the tax-collector; those who are at ease in Zion with the mourners in Zion. We must have been or now be in certain spots in soul experience, before we can sympathize with those who are in them now. So the blessed Jesus is able not only to support, but to sympathize with those who are tempted.

But what makes him able? Not merely his ability as God, but his having suffered as man; for we read in our text, "*In that* he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to support them that are tempted," where his ability is connected with his own suffering and is said to spring out of it. It is then his having been man as well as God; his having experienced temptation in his own person; his having been assaulted by sin and Satan. Though neither sin nor Satan had any place in him, yet he knew all the temptations to which we are subject

by personal experience; and his having suffered under and from them renders him able to sympathize with those that are so tempted. You are tempted to doubt God, the word and truth of God, or your own sonship. Were not these temptations brought before the mind of our sympathizing high priest, when the tempter came to him and said-"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread?" Nor was he tempted to doubt his Sonship only, but to doubt God's providence, and that he might be left in the desert to die of hunger. And have you not been tempted to doubt God's providence too? How he was tempted to doubt God's protecting hand, when he was invited to cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple! How he was tempted to turn aside from the path of suffering and sorrow to enjoy all the glory of the kingdoms of this world; and toward the close of his suffering life how, doubtless, he was tempted by the desertion of his friends and the withdrawing of the light of his Father's countenance, to doubt God's compassion and pity, when he left him, so to speak, in the hands of his enemies!

Every temptation you are subject to the dear Redeemer experienced in his own person, for "in all points he was tempted like as we are." Therefore he is able to sympathize with you in and under all, for he suffered in and under them. Now how encouraging this is to those who not only know what temptation is, but who suffer acutely from it, that our blessed high priest "*suffered*, being tempted." Temptation was not to him like the sea dashing against a rock, which repels it without feeling it. Jesus repelled it, and was no more polluted by it than the rock by the waves of the sea beating over it; but he felt it, though he repelled it. It grieved his holy soul; it pained his righteous spirit; it was so contrary to every sacred feeling of his pure breast, that though his heart did not give way in the slightest degree to the temptation presented to it, yet it was a cause of painful and poignant suffering. As Lot, in a much lower sense, did not partake in the abomination of Sodom, yet they vexed his righteous soul day by day as he saw them; so the holy soul of Jesus was grieved by the temptation in which he took no share, and which could not stain or defile his sacred spirit.

As taught then and blessed by the Holy Spirit, we see these four glorious qualifications meeting in our great high priest-first, we see him *making reconciliation for the sins of the people*, putting away their iniquities by the sacrifice of himself. We see him, secondly, *faithful to God*, and therefore not only to have executed the work with which he was charged, but to have finished it in a way whereby every perfection of God was glorified, and every attribute harmonized. Thirdly we see him *merciful*, so as to have compassion upon poor sinners, who, without that mercy being revealed, cannot live or die; and, fourthly, we see him *sympathizing*, so as to pity as well as support those who are tempted. Need I say how encouraging all this is to every saint who feels his need of this compassionate, faithful high priest? Need I urge any other motive to embolden us to present our needs before him, that from time to time we may receive his love, and blood, and grace into our heart, and live more and more to his praise, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is worthy of it all for time and for eternity?