

## **“Temptation and [Jes]us (Part 1)”– James 1:12-15 and Hebrews 4:14-16**

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and meet me in James 1...

The passage we are about to look at is one that I hope to consider with you next Sunday. You may be thinking to yourself, “Why are we looking at it today then?” That’s a great question. And there are a few answers, which we will get to in a moment. But let’s start by reading the text in James and then I’m going to take you back to something that we explored a couple of years ago in Hebrews. Yes, Hebrews. You only thought we were done with that book...

Find your way down to verse 12 in James 1 and follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

*“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (James 1:12-15)*

These verses are largely about temptation and especially about the source of temptation. But they are intended as a warning to help us in the fight against temptation. If we are going to win our wars with temptation, we will need the help of the only One who has been victorious over temptation—Jesus Christ.

But once we begin to think on Jesus—the God-Man—we may question just how much He can help us. Have you ever wondered, for example, if Jesus *really* experienced temptation as we do? After all James just said that “*God cannot be tempted by evil*” and Jesus was and is God in the flesh. On the other hand, we read in the Gospels that, shortly after His baptism, “*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*” (Matt. 4:1). A verse like that obliges anyone who takes the Bible seriously to concede that, at least in some sense, Jesus was in fact tempted.

Still, maybe upon hearing that you have thought (or are thinking now), “Yeah, *but*...He’s God. So, I mean, come on, how hard could it have really been?” If you’ve thought this, I can assure you, you are not alone. Many, if not most, Christians have at some point wondered how Jesus—God Himself—could have truly been tempted to do anything contrary to His Father’s will. In as much as the strength of temptation is derived from making sin look desirable, could Jesus really have felt the full force of temptation? “Would not his very existence as God mean that his experience of temptation was at most that of watching a strong enemy smash himself on an impregnable castle?”<sup>1</sup> Could not James’ words here be interpreted to suggest that? They could and have.

But I think that interpretation does not adequately account for the implications of Christ’s incarnation. And it doesn’t adequately account for other passages of Scripture, including the one that I would like to look at with you today, with the remainder of our time together. And that passage comes from Hebrews 4. So turn with me to Hebrews, the book just to the left of James in the Bible, and find the fourth chapter.

A couple years ago we studied the passage we are about to look at in great detail, over multiple weeks. We won't do it justice today and time will not allow for us to explore everything it has to offer. If you are looking for a more expansive treatment, I'd refer you to those sermons on our website. My goal today is more modest. I want you to see that Jesus can, in fact, relate to our struggles with temptation and this is why He can, in fact, help. I want us to have this firmly established in our brain when we turn our attention to the meaning and implications of James next week. And there are some larger theological implications we will explore in the coming weeks that will be easier to grasp if we have this text in Hebrews in our minds later.

So then, look with me at Hebrews 4, beginning in verse 14. Again, this is God's Word...

*"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:14-16)

For our purposes today, we really need to focus on verse 15, but I wanted you to see it in context. Again, that verse says, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* This is an amazing statement! The focus here is not so much on the particulars of Jesus' high priestly ministry (that's addressed elsewhere), but on the manner in which He fulfills it—sympathetically and without sin.

Both of those ideas are crucial and indispensable. Both indicate that Jesus' temptation was very real. And His experience of temptation is good news for us. There are two sides of this reality (each with its own set of objections)—the temptation side (which explains Jesus' sympathy with us) and the sinlessness side (which explains why we can be saved). There is the side that shows Jesus to be like us (tempted) and the side that shows Him to be utterly different than us (sinless). Let's begin with the first, the sympathy side...

Why is Jesus able to sympathize with us? Because, as Hebrews 2:17 states, He was made like us *"in every respect."* When the eternal Son of God came to earth, He was made human. Fully human. There is nothing that is essential or intrinsic to humanity that the incarnate Christ lacks. He was like us in every respect, save one—*"yet without sin."* But sin is not an inherent part of humanity. Adam and Eve, the first humans, were not created sinners. They were created fully human, without sin. They fell into sin when they chose to disobey the command of God and that fall corrupted their humanity (and ours). But that sin nature is not part of what it means to be truly human. It's part of what it means to be fallen. Jesus was truly human like us. Jesus was not fallen like us. (That's an important distinction that's going to come into play when we look back at James 1 next week).

And just like He was made human like us *"in every respect"* (2:17), he also *"in every respect has been tempted as we are"* (3:15). Think about that. He knows all of our temptations because during His life on earth He experienced them. To be sure, He didn't experience every *single* temptation in the few decades He walked the earth. He never experienced the temptation to watch too much Netflix or television since neither form of entertainment was available in the first century. He never experienced every individual temptation unique to a husband or an elderly man because he was never married and was younger than me when He was crucified. You get the idea. But there is not a temptation that you experience that Jesus didn't experience in some way. He didn't experience every single temptation, but every *kind* of temptation. Yet He was without sin.<sup>2</sup>

He was tempted to lie in order to save his life. He was tempted to steal to help His poor mother. He was tempted to covet the nice things that Zacchaeus owned. He was tempted to dishonor His parents because they were stricter than other parents. He was tempted to get revenge on those who wrongly accused Him. He was tempted to lust when a woman washed His feet with her hair. He was tempted to engage in self-pity when His closest friends couldn't even stay awake with Him when He needed them most. He was tempted to murmur in His heart

against God when John the Baptist was senselessly and unjustly beheaded at the whim of a dancing girl. He was tempted to gloat over His accusers when He outsmarted their attempts to embarrass Him and they couldn't answer His questions.<sup>3</sup> He understands our temptations. He knows the struggle. He shared the weaknesses of our humanity.<sup>4</sup> "He is not a distant and aloof high priest but is himself intimately acquainted with the human condition."<sup>5</sup> He truly gets it. Again, He didn't experience every single temptation, but every *kind* of temptation. Yet He was without sin. He gets it.

I'm not sure how many of you have read Homer's *Odyssey* (or seen *O Brother Where Art Thou*), but you may recall the famous scene involving the Sirens. The Sirens were these monsters that disguised themselves as beautiful women singing intoxicating songs to lure passing sailors to their island. They assure all commuters that they just want to entertain them for a while when in fact their intent was always to destroy them. Circe warns Odysseus that no man who hears the voice of the Sirens can resist their invitation.

Not wanting to die on the voyage, Odysseus has his men stop up their ears with wax so they cannot hear the Sirens' song. He opts to leave his own hearing intact, however, because he desires to be the first to hear their song and survive. So he commands his men to tie him with ropes to the mast of the ship. He instructs them to not untie him even if he struggles intensely and begs them to cut his cords. In fact, if he attempts any such request in a moment of weakness and desperation, they had orders to tie the ropes even tighter.

Sure enough they pass by Sirens and Odysseus becomes enchanted by their song. A longing surges through his body like he had never felt before. He tries with all his might to break free of his bonds, but he cannot. The ropes begin cut him deeply. In his agony, he wants nothing more than to succumb to the Sirens, yet his deaf sailors keep tightening the ropes. To him the Sirens seem as beautiful as Helen of Troy, but to his men, who are not bewitched by their song, they look like vicious and hungry monsters. In the end, Odysseus experiences to the full the agony of their song and yet was unable to give in to its call on the basis of his prior decision to take steps to ensure his survival. I once heard Art Azurdia reflect on this story as follows:

"You can imagine him tied there. His arms stretched out to either side, lashed to the crossbeam of that mast, with this overwhelming longing to yield kept in check by his own predetermination not to respond. A predetermination effected in his orders to his men.

The point? Jesus Christ had *no men* to whom He could give such an order. And yet throughout the entirety of His life that sweet song of Satan sought to lure Him away from His Father's plan. He came at Him in the wilderness. 'If you fall down and worship me, I will give you the kingdoms of the world.' It came at Him again, surprisingly, through the mouth of his own beloved disciple, Peter—'Lord, you can't go to the cross.' It came at Him again powerfully in the garden of Gethsemane as He cried out in agony to His Father, 'Must I drink from this cup?'

But the Siren's song was never more alluring than when hanging on the cross He heard from the onlookers, 'If you are the Son of God come down.' It was the last great temptation of the Siren, to abandon at the last minute the vocation to which He had been obedient all of His life. For years the voice of the Siren sang its song in His ears. He heard it over and over to the full and yet not once did He give Himself over to it because He had lashed Himself to crossbeam of obedience. The temptations were real. Powerful. The intensity of its wickedness was infinitely greater than any other temptation either before or after."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, I would argue that He knew temptation to a greater degree than you and I ever will. You have to believe that Satan knew the stakes when the Son of God came to earth and that he would have thrown every trick in the book at Jesus to trip Him up. Satan only had to win one temptation battle with Jesus to win the war of our salvation. So I'm quite sure he would have pulled out all the stops and not pulled a single punch.

Some push back and argue that Jesus' temptations would not have been as intense because there are certain temptations that we experience precisely because we are sinners. For example, we do something wrong and because of that we are tempted to lie about it. The second temptation comes to us precisely because we failed to

resist the first temptation. So doesn't that mean that we experience a greater and more intense battle with temptation? No. Actually the opposite is true. The sinlessness of Jesus means that His temptations were by necessity harder to resist than our own.

Think about it. You and I experience some temptation to sin and we may resist it for a while but if we give in and sin it is because we have convinced ourselves that the temptation was too much to bear. The sin relieves the weight of the temptation (and leaves in its place the weight of guilt and shame, but that's another matter). The longer we resist a temptation the more difficult that temptation becomes. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are yet He never sinned so that must mean that He knew the full strength of each and every temptation in a way that we never could. Why? Because we always give in before the power of a temptation is exhausted. Here's how C. S. Lewis explained it in his classic, *Mere Christianity*:

“A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist.”<sup>7</sup>

I so hope this deepens your worship. Your salvation *required* the sinlessness of Christ. You know how challenging it is to resist temptation to sin in your own life. But Jesus' battle with temptation was infinitely greater. Praise Him then, for He waged that war perfectly for your sake. He fought every temptation through blood, sweat, and tears so that people like us who have given in with regularity could be spared God's judgment. What a Savior! “The agony of His obedience was squeezed out to the last drop and that is why we have a sympathetic resident in heaven.”<sup>8</sup> In the words of Hebrews 2:18, “*because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*”<sup>9</sup> He has suffered. He is sympathetic to our suffering. He can help. The sympathetic nature of Jesus, our Savior, is one of the most sustaining truths the Bible offers for the Christian journey.

Years ago I learned of a phenomenon that the *Oxford Companion to Music* calls, “sympathetic resonance.” I've mentioned this before, but it's worth a second look. Here's the gist of “sympathetic resonance”:

“If two tuning-forks of the same pitch be placed in position for sounding and one of them be set in vibration, the other will take up the vibrations sympathetically; the first fork is then a generator of sound and the second a resonator.”<sup>10</sup>

Here's another scenario. Suppose we rolled in a second piano on the opposite side of the stage, I close off the room, and make my way to the first piano where I strike a random note. It's middle C. Do you know what would happen to that second piano? The same note on the opposite piano would gently respond as that string begins to vibrate even though no key on that second instrument was disturbed. This is called “sympathetic resonance.”

So what's the point? Christ was made like us in every respect. He was fully human. You might say, He had the same instrument as us and, when He passed through the heavens at His ascension, He took that same instrument with Him. And now every time a note is struck in the weakness of your human instrument, it resonates in heaven in His. “There is no note of human experience that does not play on Christ's exalted human instrument.”<sup>11</sup> That's the point of verse 15—“*we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...*” He is capable of unparalleled understanding and sympathy.

“Whatever we may be going through, there is not a note we can play, not a melody or a dirge, no minor key, no discordant note, that does not evoke a ‘sympathetic resonance’ in Jesus. He mastered the instrument while he was here on earth, and he wears it in Heaven. Do you want sympathy? Do not go anywhere else. Dare not go to anyone but him!”<sup>12</sup>

What is more, it is precisely this that Jesus invites us to do—turn to Him for the help we need in this life. He wants to help us. As Richard Phillips remarks,

“The Lord you serve, the Savior to whom you look, is not aloof from your trials, but feels them with intimate acquaintance. He is not disinterested or cold to what you are going through; he came to this earth and took up our human nature precisely so that he might now be able to have a fellow feeling with us. Therefore, he is eminently able to represent you before the throne of his heavenly Father, pleading your cause, securing your place, and procuring the spiritual resources you need.”<sup>13</sup>

And that’s why the next verse in Hebrews invites us to go to the Lord for help. Verse 16 says,

*“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:16)

And this is exactly what I will invite you to do next week, when we look at what James explains about our experience of temptation. We need to take our weakness to God’s throne for the help we need. Our Lord wants to help because, He is sympathetic. And He can help, because He is without sin. That second point is something I’ll stress a bit more next week. But let me read you something from John Piper that really gets us to the heart of the Gospel. In commenting on the wonderful invitation, in verse 16, to go to God’s throne, he writes:

“Every one of us needs help. We are not God. We have needs. We have weaknesses. We have confusion. We have limitations of all kinds. We need help.

But every one of us has something else: sin. And therefore at the bottom of our hearts we know that we do not deserve the help we need. And so we feel trapped. I need help to live my life and to handle death and to cope with eternity — help with my family, my spouse, my children, my loneliness, my job, my health, my finances. I need help. But I don’t deserve the help I need.

So what can I do? I can try to deny it all and be a superman who doesn’t need any help. Or I can try to drown it all and throw my life into a pool of sensual pleasures. Or I can simply give way to the paralysis of despair. But God declares over this hopeless conclusion: Jesus Christ became a High Priest to shatter that despair with hope and to humble that superman or superwoman and to rescue that drowning wretch.

Yes, we all need help. Yes, none of us deserves the help we need. But *no* to despair and pride and lechery. Look at what God says. Because we have a great High Priest, the throne of God is a throne of *grace*. And the help we get at that throne is mercy and grace to help in time of need. Grace to help! Not *deserved* help — gracious help. This is the whole point of the Old and New Testaments. God planned for a High Priest, a Savior, a Redeemer, a gracious Helper.

You are not trapped. Say no to that lie. We need help. We don’t deserve it. But we can have it. You can have it right now and forever. If you will receive and trust in your High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, and draw near to God through him.”<sup>14</sup>

Amen. The invitation of verse 16 is a game-changer. We don’t have to keep our distance anymore. We don’t have to hide. We are welcomed, in Christ, at the throne of God. I’m reminded of the invitation the reader receives later in the epistle,

*“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,<sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God,<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,*

*with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*  
(Hebrews 10:19-22)

It is our faith that assures us that we can approach God. Our faith that Christ has opened the way for us to come before God. Our faith that we don't need to fear that we will find a throne of condemnation because Christ has atoned for our sins.<sup>15</sup> It has become for us *“the throne of grace”* because of the work of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

What's most remarkable here, however, is not *just* that we are invited to come before God, but that we are invited to come *boldly*. We are told to come *“with confidence.”* Even in our weakness and frailty, *“naked and exposed”* before God (4:13), we are still invited to come confidently because we know that our Great High Priest, Jesus, has fully and finally put away our sins.<sup>17</sup> But this is true only for the believer. For those who have not trusted in the work of Christ, the throne remains a throne of judgment and wrath. But for those whose faith rest in Christ alone, *“Righteous judgment has been replaced by radical mercy.”*<sup>18</sup> What a difference a Great High Priest makes, amen?

Richard Phillips writes,

“We cannot overestimate the importance of such confidence. Many Christians struggle with prayer. We tremble as with stage fright, as if the light from God's throne exposed us in naked shame, when in fact it reveals the radiant robes that have been draped around us, the righteousness of Christ given to all who trust in him. This is the key to prayer—to praying often, to praying openly, to praying boldly and freely and with gladness of heart—to know that we come clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, invited by his own saving ministry, purchased by his precious blood, and anticipated by his sympathetic intercession. This is the secret to lively and happy prayer.”<sup>19</sup>

And what happens when we come boldly before this throne of grace? Verse 16 says we find mercy and grace to help in our time of need. We find all the mercy we could ever need to cover all our sins. And we find all the grace we need for every situation we face in this life. Mercy for past sins and failures. Grace for today's trouble and work. Every resource we could possibly need in this life is kept for us to receive at the throne of God's grace. “But, of course, the condition for timely mercy and grace is confident and frank prayer. If we fail to pray, we rob ourselves of the great, timely resources God holds for us.”<sup>20</sup> So we are invited to come. Don't try to make it through this life in your own resourcefulness. That will always fail you. Come to God with the confidence that He has what you truly require and He is eager to give it in your time of need.

And if this is true, then may we not shrink back in neglect and fear. Let us draw near in prayer. We need not fear wearing God out. This is an invitation to come before God in prayer. And it's an urgent invitation...

“We dare not be prayerless....prayerlessness is the root of all sin. When we do not give time each day to earnest and believing prayer, we are saying that we can cope with life without divine aid. It is human arrogance at its worst....To be prayerless is to be guilty of the worst form of practical atheism. We are saying that we believe in God but we can do without him. It makes us careless about our former sins and heedless of our immediate needs. This letter urges us to come into the presence of a God who welcomes us and a Christ who understands us. To neglect the place of prayer is to rob ourselves of immense and timely resources. For the Christian the throne of grace is the place of help.”<sup>21</sup>

So what are you struggling with? What temptations have been getting the best of you? Let's take them to the Lord in prayer...

Pray with me...

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<sup>1</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 678.

<sup>2</sup> “The notion that Jesus was sinless is a common theme in the NT. Even where it is not stated, it is presupposed. Nonetheless, a number of texts explicitly affirm his sinlessness (Luke 23:41; John 7:18; 8:46; 14:30; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5).” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 153.

<sup>3</sup> This catalog of examples is based off of a similar list found in “Draw Near to the Throne of Grace with Confidence,” a sermon preached by John Piper on September 15, 1996, and accessed at the following web address: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/draw-near-to-the-throne-of-grace-with-confidence>.

<sup>4</sup> T. H. Robinson writes, “His whole life was one of temptation, and the very fact that he had powers and abilities which we do not possess only added to the stress. He was the fullest and most vivid personality that this world has ever known, and the very richness of His human nature exposed Him all the more fully to the assaults of temptation.” Quoted by Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1982), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 153.

<sup>6</sup> “The Greatest of Our High Priest,” by Art Azurdia, accessed online at the following address: [http://www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com/downloads/297\\_49.mp3](http://www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com/downloads/297_49.mp3).

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 124, 125.

<sup>8</sup> Azurdia, “The Greatest of Our High Priest.”

<sup>9</sup> As Raymond Brown remarks, “He can be of far greater help to us than any [mere] human priest because, whilst it is true that they sympathized, they also sinned.” Brown, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 14.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 130.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 149-150.

<sup>14</sup> Piper, “Draw Near to the Throne of Grace with Confidence.”

<sup>15</sup> Charles Spurgeon once told his congregation: “I could not say to you, ‘Pray,’ not even to you saints, unless it were a throne of grace, much less could I talk of prayer to you sinners; but now I will say this to every sinner here, though he should think himself to be the worst sinner that ever lived, cry unto the Lord and seek him while he may be found. A throne of grace is a place fitted for you: go to your knees, by simple faith go to your Savior, for he, he it is who is the throne of grace.” Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Throne of Grace,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 63 vols. (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 17:860.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin was in awe of the statement “throne of grace.” He wrote, “The basis of this confidence is that the throne of God is not marked by a naked majesty which overpowers us, but is adorned with a new name, that of *grace*. This is the name that we ought always to keep in mind when we avoid the sight of God.... The glory of God cannot but fill us with despair, such is the awfulness of his throne. Therefore in order to help our lack of confidence, and to free our minds of all fears, the apostle clothes it with grace and gives it a name which will encourage us by its sweetness. It is as if he were saying, Since God has fixed on His throne... a banner of grace and of fatherly love towards us, there is no reason why His majesty should ward us off from approaching Him.” William B. Johnston, trans., *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 57.

<sup>17</sup> “Many Christians struggle in their relationship with God, especially when it comes to prayer. The reason for this is felt by the writer of Hebrews, and it is expressed in what he has said in the preceding verse: “No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). Anyone with any spiritual awareness is made very uneasy by the thought of God’s searching gaze. Remember the scene in the garden after Adam and Eve had first sinned. In their original state, before they fell into sin, they were ‘naked and were not ashamed’” (Gen. 2:25). With no sin to condemn them, they delighted in the gaze of their loving Creator. But after the fall, they hid their shame even from one another, pathetically sewing on fig leaves for garments. Even more, they dreaded the presence of God, fleeing and hiding from him as he approached. This is how many Christians feel in their relationship with God. The thought of his gaze chills their bones. They are willing to do anything but deal with God himself, skulking around the edges of his light rather than drawing near to him. They struggle to pray and seldom do unless forced by circumstances. It is this paralyzing fear that the writer of Hebrews now addresses. As Philip Hughes explains: ‘Sinners are no longer commanded to keep their distance in fear and trembling, but on the contrary are now invited to *draw near*, and to do so *with confidence*.’ The reason for this change is the saving work of Jesus Christ to reconcile sinners to God. In particular, two aspects of that work come into view here: He has made propitiation for us in the heavenly tabernacle, and

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he now ministers on high with sympathy for our weakness. When God discovered Adam and Eve's sin, he punished them by barring them from the garden and cursing them. But God then took the initiative in restoring them to fellowship with himself. Genesis 3:21 tells us, "The LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." God sacrificed an animal in their place and clothed them with the garment of the innocent substitute he had provided. That is a wonderful picture of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and whose perfect righteousness is imputed to us." Phillips, 147-148.

<sup>18</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr. *Exalting Christ in Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 68.

<sup>19</sup> Phillips, 151-152.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 96-97.