

## Hebrews 4:14-16 (1)

Having exhorted his readers, the author of Hebrews is also careful to explain the reasons for his commands, as well pointing to the resources which are given to them to do them. Hebrews chapter 4 concludes the long exhortation that began in chapter 3, in which the author charges his readers to press on in the faith, not hardening their hearts in the face of difficulties. To do this, he has presented two key resources. First, he mentioned Christian encouragement (**Heb 3:13**). Secondly, the Word of God, which imparts life to believers and stirs them up in the faith (**Heb 4:12-13**). He now points to a third resource: prayer, through which Christians come before God's very throne to receive the mercy and grace they need to press on.

### Summary

**In Hebrews 4:14-16, the author of Hebrews reminds believers that we may approach God with confidence because of the redeeming ministry of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, our great high priest.**

#### **1. Necessary Requirement vs. 14b**

The author begins by restating the requirement that this letter continually stresses; the command to persevere in the Christian faith (**Heb 4:14b**).

This is vitally necessary but it is NOT easy to do (**Matt. 7:13-14**).

The author says it is "our confession" to which we must hold fast (**Heb 4:14**).

The early church employed theological formulas to express what they believed.

This reminds us that there is truth content to our profession of faith and that this content is vitally important. It matters what we believe; there is content of which we cannot let go, without letting go of salvation in Christ: things like who Jesus is and what he has done to save us from our sins.

It is our Christian confession, to which we are required to hold fast.

#### **2. Motivating Reason vs. 14a, 15**

What is it that motivates Christian people to enter into a life of struggle and strife, holding fast to our confession?

The reason behind our perseverance is the person and work of Jesus Christ, who as the Son of God and as our great high priest has secured our salvation ahead of us (**Heb 4:14a**). Jesus and his saving work are presented as the antidote to fear: fear of failure, fear of falling away, and the fear of drawing near to God.

Many Christians struggle in their relationship with God, especially when it comes to prayer. The reason for this is seen in **Heb. 4:13** (c.f. Adam & Eve **Gen 3**).

It is this paralyzing fear that the author of Hebrews now addresses.

Sinners are no longer commanded to keep their distance in dread and terror, 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. Two aspects of that work are in particular view here: first, he has made atonement for believers in the heavenly tabernacle; secondly, He now ministers on high with sympathy for our weakness.

When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, God cast them out from the garden under His judgment and curse BUT God first took the initiative in restoring them to fellowship with himself (**Gen 3:21**).

When the author of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as our high priest, he emphasizes Christ's atoning work in His death on the cross. He compares what Jesus did by dying and rising from the dead and then ascending into heaven and the ceremonial office performed by Israel's high priest (c.f. day of atonement).

Israel's priests pointed forward to Jesus, the great high priest. He is great because his sacrifice achieved a finished atonement, unlike the ones repeatedly offered by Aaron, Unlike Aaron, who was denied entry into the Promised Land because of his sin, and unlike the high priests who followed Aaron who were themselves sinners and could not offer the true sacrifice, Jesus has entered the land of rest, heaven itself, and has finished our redemption. Because Jesus is our high priest, we are reconciled to God. This means that we can approach him freely.

The second aspect of Christ's priestly ministry is the sympathy He bears for us in heaven (**Heb 4:15**). Our Lord and Savior is not aloof from your trials, but is intimately acquainted with them.

That is the reason you must not give up, because Christ is there in heaven bearing human flesh, having endured what you are going through now and yet without himself falling into sin. He has opened the way for you, established your place where he is, and now he prays for your spiritual provision and protection to the Father who is certain to receive his every petition.

Yes, there are hardships and troubles for believers in this world. The author of Hebrews has assured us of this by comparing our earthly pilgrimage to Israel's journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land but Jesus assured his disciples: "I will not leave you as orphans. . . . Because I live, you also will live" (**John 14:18-19**). What a great reason this is for hope, and what strength it gives to persevere.