

Unstaggering Confidence at the Throne of Grace

Mark Altrogge¹

Part 1

I live in fear of computer problems because I dread the idea of calling technical support lines. I've never actually had a bad experience with tech support, but computer experts intimidate me. Whenever I call I feel like Dorothy before the Wizard of Oz. I imagine a huge, wrathful image on the other end of the line belching forth flames and smoke.

“Who is this that dares to call me?” the voice erupts. “What is your registration number?”

Sweat trickling down my neck, I mutter, “I...um...forgot to mail it in.”

“You WHAT?”

Last summer I bought a new computer for my little home-recording studio. One reason I bought this particular model was to avoid ever having to call tech support. You see, my computer-savvy friend Steve Cook had the same computer. Steve told me to call whenever I needed help. No flames, smoke, or registration number required. One night I took him up on his offer.

Graciously, he listened to my problem and guided me toward the solution. “Mark, do you see that little apple icon in the upper left corner of the screen?” he said. “Click on it.”

This was what I needed—someone to tell me to click on the little apple! Using plain English, Steve got my computer up and running again.

In a similar way, I often feel intimidated entering into worship. In fact, the longer I walk with Christ, the more aware I seem to become of my sins, selfish motives, and general unworthiness to stand in God's presence. I can identify with Paul's experience in Romans 7: when I want to do good, sin is right there with me.

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¹ Mark Altrogge is senior pastor of Lord of Life Church in Indiana, Pennsylvania. Mark has also published more than 100 songs for worship, including “I Stand in Awe” and “I'm Forever Grateful.”

Meanwhile Satan, the accuser of the brethren, is quick to weigh in. “How can you presume to lead worship? Have you forgotten that conflict you had with your wife last night? You hypocrite!”

Do you lead corporate worship? Even if you do, I bet you can identify with this feeling. Hebrews 4:14–16 provides great comfort for all worshipers who struggle with fear and intimidation:

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

Because we have a great high priest on the throne of grace, we should come to it with, in the words of Charles Spurgeon, “unstaggering confidence.”

In his message “The Throne of Grace,” Spurgeon describes this throne:

It is . . . set up on purpose for the dispensation of grace; a throne from which every utterance is an utterance of grace; the scepter that is stretched out from it is the scepter of grace; the decrees proclaimed from it are purposes of grace; the gifts that are scattered down its golden steps are gifts of grace; and he that sits upon the throne is grace itself.

For believers, God’s throne is not called the Throne of Law or the Throne of Condemnation, but the Throne of Grace.

Because of the shed blood of Jesus, there is now *no wrath, no eternal judgment, and no condemnation remaining* for us who have called upon Christ. All that remains for us is God’s favor.

I was far more confident calling my friend Steve for computer help than some anonymous tech-head because I knew him to be not only capable, but also gracious and eager to bless me.

We will reflect further on the idea that worship is an invitation to the throne of Jesus Christ, where there is only grace and favor waiting for us. May this thought give us great joy and confidence as we approach him in worship.

Part 2

We looked at a problem common to many worship leaders and worshipers alike: a sense of fear and unworthiness in God's presence. Just being aware of the daily battle with sin can hinder our efforts to worship God sincerely.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I have found myself in sin right in the middle of leading a congregation in worship. I'll notice a church member looking bored and distracted. Immediately, self-righteousness rises up in my heart and I find myself judging him for not worshipping.

Meanwhile, I'm so distracted by his non-participation that I'm not worshipping either! "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me....What a wretched man I am!" (Romans 7:21) If I don't come into worship condemned, I can give the accuser of the brethren plenty of ammunition during worship itself. My heart can be cold, or I can be distracted by a whole array of sinful thoughts. Hebrews 4:14-16 holds great encouragement for sinners like you and me:

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

We began looking at the tremendous encouragement this passage gives worshipers—that the throne to which we come is a throne of grace. For believers, the throne is not a place of judgment or condemnation, but a throne from which grace is dispensed. The Lord assures his people in Jeremiah 32:38-41:

They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

God's everlasting intention is to do good to us and never stop doing good to us. He rejoices in doing us good with all his heart and soul. It's one thing for me to put my

whole heart into doing good to someone, but it's another thing for God himself to put his whole heart and soul into doing us good!

We are accepted in the Beloved. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness. God himself has purchased us and established a covenant to never stop doing good to us. It wasn't our idea; God himself decided that he would forever pour out grace upon us. His good intentions don't depend upon our obedience or response to him either. No, God has made a decision to never stop doing good to us no matter what. This is the God we come to and this is the throne we come to.

Part 3

Oh come all ye fearful, trembling and defeated, come now and grovel 'neath the weight of your sin... Ever feel like this when you come to worship God? Satan loves to make us aware of our sins when we come before God in worship. Not that we need much help from him—our own hearts already condemn us.

Hebrews 4:14–16 reminds us that because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ we now come to a throne of grace, not a throne of condemnation or terror.

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

Because the throne is a throne of grace, God is now predisposed to pour out blessings upon us. Last week we examined God's covenant promise in Jeremiah 32:38–40 to never stop doing good to us. This week, we'll look at the astounding abundance of that grace.

An old television game show used to reward the winner with prize after prize. The game show host would say to an unseen announcer, "Don, tell Mary what she has won." Then the voice of the disembodied announcer would begin, "Congratulations, Mary. You have just won an all-expense-paid trip to Rio de Janeiro!"

Mary would clap and squeal with joy as the announcer described the trip. Then he'd continue. "And that's not all, Mary. While in Rio de Janeiro you'll receive \$10,000 for a shopping spree!"

Mary would look stunned, ready to faint, but as the crowd cheered, she'd manage to listen to the details of her various shopping opportunities. "But wait, Mary. There's more! To get from store to store you'll need transportation. That's why we're giving you...a brand-new car! And should you get chilly driving through those cool Rio evenings, in the back seat you'll find...a full-length fur coat!"

On and on he'd go, unveiling one prize after another. As exciting as that would be, it is nothing compared to the store of prizes God has ready for us. Ephesians 2:6–7 paints the picture: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

See how predisposed God is to bless us? He has so much grace stored up for us that it will take the coming ages to reveal all the riches he has for us in Christ Jesus. How much grace is that? It won't simply take one age to show us all his grace; it will take the coming ages to exhaust his supply of blessings! In other words, the grace that God has in store for us is infinite. Age after age...forever and ever...stretching into infinity, God will pour out grace upon us from his throne. An infinite God intends infinite blessings for his people.

It's a staggering thought. That's the throne we come to when we worship.

Part 4

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

We've tried to combat our tendency to allow a sense of unworthiness to warp our perspective of the God we worship. Unless we understand that the throne we are invited to is a throne of grace, as Hebrews 4:14–16 shows us, we'll be crippled by fear and intimidation when we come before him.

We've been reminded that the throne is of grace, not judgment or condemnation. We've seen God's predisposition to bless us, and we've marveled at the amazing abundance of grace he's stored up for us.

Now let's allow Hebrews 12:18–24 to challenge any inaccurate notions of the God we come to worship:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

This passage is speaking about our new covenant relationship with God—the covenant made through the cross of Christ. The Israelites' experience of the Lord at Mount Sinai was terrifying. Essentially, the old covenant said, “Do not come near. Do not touch. Do not look.” Even the things they heard evoked fear and trembling. The new covenant, on the other hand, says, “Draw near to the living God through the blood of Jesus. Look around and see the saints and angels in joyful assembly. Listen to the songs of angelic choirs and hear the blood of Jesus speaking.”

The blood of Abel spoke condemnation to Cain. But now we hear the blood of Jesus speaking, “There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!”

What is your mentality when you come to worship? Do you view worship as if coming to a terrible, burning mountain, or into the joyful presence of a merciful God? Let us draw near the throne emblazoned with the word *grace*.