

Responding to God's Love in Prayer

† **fearless** (vv.7-11a)

† **faithful** (vv.10-12)

† **confident** (vv.13-14)

In the name of Jesus, our one Mediator, dear fellow heirs of Christ's kingdom:

Are skeptics multiplying? One stubborn skeptic in each of us? Critical questions of friends and co-workers – how do you answer your own doubts and fears? The Bible picks up on that: ***“Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21f NIV84) Christianity alone of all the religions dares you to prove it wrong. Paul's simple test in 1 Corinthians 15: Just disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Your stubborn skeptic pauses, and God's kindness turns him around.

Imagine you're an awesome champion of ___ [name your sport]. Just a dream, but you have a rival teammate who always does better than you no matter how hard you try. Then he starts throwing passes your way, pushing assists to make you look good. In interviews he talks about how great it is to have you on his team. You know it's really the other way around. Yet, wouldn't it be great to have someone like that on your team – someone like Moses in the desert with Israel? Ah, Moses! He's...

† **fearless** (vv.7-11a)

Such a bad bunch of former slaves. How could anyone see ten miraculous plagues in Egypt – the Red Sea parted when Moses raised his staff, Pharaoh and his army drowned as the waters returned, guidance from God all the way to Mount Sinai – how could they? It was so terrifying when God came down on that mountain –thunder and lightning and smoke, God's voice with blasting trumpets from heaven – even Moses was trembling with fear. But then Moses is on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, chiseled in stone with God's finger, and the Israelites? Worshipping the golden calf.

Late night comedy can only mock, but God hates sin. ***The LORD spoke to Moses: “Hurry down, because your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves! They have quickly turned from the way which I commanded them. They have made a calf for themselves out of metal and worshipped it. They have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’”*** (EHV¹) Wouldn't that rattle you to hear God say that?

But then a test? ***The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen these people, and they are a stiff-necked people. So now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn hot against them, so that I may consume them and make you into a great nation.”*** Moses had no way of knowing that Israel's rebellion would have him leading them forty years, finally losing his temper and the Promised Land. Ask your skeptic, “Does this sound like how religious freaks would write myths and legends? The heroes are all bad?”

Have any of us even kept the first of God's Ten Commandments? What's been trying to crowd into your mind this morning while you try to listen to God's Word? Friends, hobbies, sports, games you're saving for? Whatever has your heart, that's your idol. God's infinite wrath wants to destroy all idols and those who worship them. God cannot put up with sin even from His own chosen nation Israel.

So where does this come from? ***Moses begged the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your anger burn against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?”*** Fearless! Setting the record straight with God? Anyone on your team like that?

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† faithful (vv.10-12)

Moses passes the test, but he wants to twist the arm of the Almighty: *“Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He brought them out for an evil purpose, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?’”* By appealing to God’s Name-reputation, Moses gives every skeptic reason to stop doubting. Moses says God’s enemies will ridicule Him for destroying His chosen people. *“Moses was faithful in all God’s house...faithful as a servant...testifying to what would be said in the future.”* (Hebrews 3:2-5 NIV84) Do you have someone on your team who is not only **fearless** but **faithful**?

Twice in the Bible the Holy Spirit says, *“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”* (Numbers 23:19 NIV84) *He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”* (1 Samuel 15:29 NIV84) So how could Moses pray like this? *“Turn back from your fierce anger and change your mind about inflicting disaster on your people.”*

Sinners can’t imagine being *sorry* or *repenting* without admitting you were wrong. But God sets all the rules. He cannot sin no matter what. His infinite mercy wants everyone to be saved; His infinite justice demands every sin be punished. That never changes. He just found a way to do both. Moses is begging God to look away from His infinite justice and *“in wrath remember mercy.”* (Habakkuk 3:2) The LORD allows Himself to be *moved* from His solemn promise to punish to His gracious promise to forgive. In God’s unchanging grace *“mercy triumphs over judgment.”* (James 2:13) Anyone so **faithful** for you?

† confident (vv.13-14)

Kindness makes my skeptic ask, “Why is Moses so **confident**?” God’s promises! *“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self. You said to them, ‘I will multiply your seed like the stars of the sky, and I will give all this land that I have spoken about to your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.’”* Moses is **confident** in God’s promises.

Can you and I be **confident** for an outcome like this? *Then the LORD changed his mind about the disaster which he said he would inflict on his people.* The truth is nestled in those words *changed his mind* which is really how it looks to us, but not at all in the mind of God.

For my inner skeptic God makes it simple and clear. He threatens to punish all sin even for rebellious Israelites in the desert. God wants us to fear His wrath to keep us from sinning. After He tears down our idols, God makes us **confident** that every sin has been punished. Moses and all the prophets pointed to the Messiah in sweet promises of God, so sure and certain they were as good as done: *“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows...Smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* (Isaiah 53:4-6 NKJV)

Jesus is not only the Mediator that prays for you – **fearless, faithful, confident** – like Moses, but better by far, Jesus is your Savior whose kindness always means that God’s mercy will triumph over His judgment. Jesus did this for Saul the violent persecutor whom He converted to Paul the missionary to us Gentiles. God’s unchanging desire is that *“everyone...be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Timothy 2:4) Maybe you’re that sheep that wandered far from God. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to go searching for one – you! Maybe you’re like Levi the tax collector all wrapped up in money until Jesus searches for you like one lost coin, then rejoices to find you. Jesus says, *“There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* (Luke 15:10) That’s not just the angels rejoicing, that Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit – God Himself celebrates your return. Now you can be steady, **Responding to God’s Love in Prayer** for others. God’s kindness melts the skeptic to **fearless, faithful, confident** love of God’s amazing grace. Amen.