**Commendable by Faith**

Based on [Hebrews 11:1-16](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn1.1)

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The book of Hebrews tackles what is today one of the most scandalous and controversial teachings of the Word of God…namely that without faith it is impossible to please God. That God commends us for faith, that it is the source of all virtue, and that without faith a man is simply “spinning his wheels” before God. This means that a person who is a law abiding citizen, who apparently never cheats or steals or lies, a person who gives to charity, respects his wife, is patient with his children, a person who we would say in an outward way expresses every virtue, but holds no regard for the words and promises of God, is condemned.

And on the other hand, it means that a person who struggles with outward virtue, who is apparently a deadbeat and a loser, who is hated by the world and finds no success in it, but who trusts in the word and promises of God, is saved. **Now I don’t mean the hypocrite, the person who as the bible says, “practices sin”, who nurtures it and lives in it.** Such a person has no faith, even if their lips say Lord, Lord, Christ does not know them. But what makes a person righteous in God’s sight is not his ability to succeed in the world and accomplish his goals. What makes a person commendable to God is that he has faith in what God says. So what is this faith?

Hebrews says, “**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by [faith] the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.**” (11:1-3). The book of Hebrews points out how what is seen cannot create itself. We call the study of things that are seen “science.” Science can tell us how the world works, it can study the things that are made. Science can study nature, but it cannot tell us the most important thing…where nature comes from..who made it.

But Hebrews points out that by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Nature is the way it is because God tells it to be that way. Gravity, is “the force of attraction by which terrestrial bodies tend to fall towards the center of the earth.” Science tells us that all things fall to the earth at a certain velocity relative to their mass. In short, gravity says that things fall; science says that all things fall at a certain speed; but it is God who says to all things “fall.” Why does nature work the way it does, because God tells it to. And this is perceived not by science, for the eye cannot observe itself, but it is known as Hebrews says by faith; because faith concerns things unseen.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. This is not simply wishful thinking. You can hope to win the lottery, and be assured that you will, but that does not make you commendable to God. The things hoped for are not whatever your sinful and covetous heart desires. The “things hoped for” by faith are the words and promises of God. Before he would send a flood that would change the life and the landscape of the whole world--change biology and geology as he knew it--God promised Noah that he would save him by an ark. For 120 years Noah waited for the flood to come, in that time he built an ark according to God’s promise because he believed the flood was coming, though he could not see it. And when the flood came the ark lifted Noah and his family above the destruction. But according to the big picture, it wasn’t the ark that saved Noah, it was his assurance that God would save him by the ark. And this would just be wishful thinking except for this; God had verbally made that promise to Noah.

Why does hoping for the lottery, and having assurance you’re gonna win not grant you God’s approval…because God never promised you will win the lottery. He never spoke the winning numbers to you such that you can trust in them, buy the ticket accordingly and believe. In this way many people lose the assurance of faith. I knew a young man once who said he believed in God, but he wasn’t content to simply listen to the bible. He said that the bible just didn’t address his daily concerns, and decided he wanted to find a way to get God to speak to him. He has since committed suicide. True story, though I can’t say one caused the other. **I can say that when you hope for things beyond what God has promised to give you, it will lead to despair**. And if you are not content until he speaks the promise you are looking for, we will have no assurance of faith.

So what are we to hope for, such that we have faith pleasing to God? We are to hope for Daily bread, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from all temptation and evil. Notice that’s what Jesus tells us to pray for in the Lord’s prayer. It is when we pray and have assurance in these things, heavenly treasures, that God is pleased with us. Jesus says, “Fear not little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Faith is having your treasure in things not seen, in the heavenly places. This would be a naïve pipe dream except that we have a promise from God that we have treasures waiting for us there even a crown of eternal life. This crown is not made of gold or silver, this treasure was not won by our obedience. This heavenly treasure is the blood of Jesus Christ, offered to the Father as a ransom for our sins, so that we inherit all that he has and all that he is. This heavenly treasure is and remains unseen, but is our assurance and conviction. At the cross, the people did not see Jesus dying for our sins and paying a ransom. What they saw was an innocent man dying. But what happened was a heavenly exchange. There Jesus traded his righteousness for our sins, so that before God he died that we might live. At this altar, Jesus gives his body and blood for us to eat and to drink giving us forgiveness, life, and deliverance the very things we hope and pray for. We do not see it. What we see is bread in a dish, wine in a cup, but we drink a heavenly treasure. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

And one more thing about faith…death has no power over it. To the person who has no faith in God’s promises; death is the end, it is the final word; nothing is more serious than death. And so it is that the faith of Abraham was tested and established when God told him to sacrifice and kill his own son as an offering he was willing to do it. The faithless think “what a barbaric God, to test his people by giving them such awful and confusing commands to see if they will do it.” And they tend to think Abraham doesn’t deserve to be commended for his faith; he deserves to be locked up. Killing his own son just because God tells him to, what a coward. The Nazi’s tried to use the excuse that “they were just following orders” when they committed genocide against the Jews. That excuse doesn’t free Abraham from guilt any more than them.

But here’s the thing. Abraham was not commended for faith because he was willing to kill his son at God’s command. Abraham’s faith was commended because he believed God, who had promised that Isaac, his son would be his heir through whom the messiah would come. Abraham knew this, was assured of this hope because, God had made a promise and God does not lie. Isaac was not even married yet, and he had left no heir. Since God cannot lie, Abraham knew that God would either stay his hand or else raise Isaac from the dead. Hebrews says this “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named” [Abraham] considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Hebrews 11:18-19).

Faith is the only thing that pleases God. Had Abraham been willing to sacrifice his Son out of obedience to the law without faith, he would have been condemned. But because he had faith that God does not lie, and that God can even raise the dead…he was and still is commended.

So to, we believe that God has forgiven us and he does not lie. We also believe that God can even raise the dead and since he can do that, nothing can rob us of assurance. For even if we lose everything to rust, or moths, or bandits--even our life--God can and will give it back again.

*"Though take ye our life, Goods fame child and wife; Though they all be gone, the victory has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth."*

That’s assurance; that’s faith.