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⁴ By faith^hAbel offered to Godⁱa more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And^jthrough his faith, though he died, he^kstill speaks. ⁵ By faith^lEnoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God^mmust believe that he exists andⁿthat he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ By faithⁿNoah, being warned by God concerning^oevents as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of^pthe righteousness that comes by faith.

Would you be shocked to learn that I believe that evolution is the best explanation for the existence of the universe? I do indeed believe this and told Karen's uncle the same thing when I spoke with him a few years ago. Karen's uncle worked for NASA his entire career and is a firm believer in Darwinian evolution. During our conversation, he was going on and on about the various benefits of evolution. I told him that I agreed with him—that I wholeheartedly believed evolution is the very best explanation of the universe. Not only that, but I told him that evolution is the *only* explanation of the universe—**IF** you remove supernatural explanations. If you remove God from the picture, evolution is not the best option, it is the only option. You must choose evolution because there is no other option available. The influence of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* continues grows larger with every passing year. As atheist Richard Dawkins has famously said, Darwinian evolution “made it possible to be an intellectually satisfied atheist.”

The Bible begins with creation, it ends with re-creation and everything else in between is the story of redemption. We *live* in God's creation. We *are* one of his creations. Therefore, we are *accountable* to the Creator. This is the part that Richard Dawkins and Karen's uncle do not like. They don't want the personal accountability to a Creator so they choose the only alternative—evolution.

It should not surprise us then, that this famous chapter on faith in Hebrews 11 begins with creation. *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.* We tend to forget this verse is in this chapter and instead skip ahead to the great men and women of faith—Noah, Abraham and Moses. But we must not skip this verse as it is integral to our faith. We are told that faith is necessary for knowing and understanding knowing the foundations of the world, the creation of the universe.

Did you know that atheism itself has evolved? Since the beginning of creation, people have rejected God and replaced him with something else and Darwinian, evolutionary atheism is merely the next layer in the fossil record of God-haters. In the saddest possible twist of irony, the creation that evolutionists seek to strip of divine authority is the very thing which speaks of his majesty and glory. Romans 1 tells us that us that the truth of the Creator has to be willingly suppressed.

¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* ²¹ *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*¹

Unless you finished your shopping on black Friday, you still have some Christmas shopping to do. Besides finding the killer gift at a rock bottom price, what is the most important thing to consider when shopping for Christmas gifts? The return policy, right? Is it returnable? Do I get my money back or just a gift card? This is important stuff! Now imagine that you returned a \$100 watch that your wife gave you for Christmas—which, incidentally, I don't recommend—but when instead of getting your \$100 back the store clerk gave you a plastic watch with Barney the dinosaur on it. Would you consider that a fair exchange? You would think that that was a horrible exchange! It's almost inconceivable how people can exchange the glory of the immortal God for anything else. This is why I said that atheism has evolved. People used to exchange God for images of wood and gold but now they exchange the immortal God for the theory of atheistic evolution. And both the ancient pagans and the modern atheists do it for the exact same reason—to avoid accountability to the living God.

Fundamentally, we believe that *the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.* We accept the creation of the universe because it is stated in God's Word—Scripture² Creation causes one to be accountable to the Creator. The

author is grounding his explanation of faith in the doctrine of creation. When he wrote verse three he clearly had Genesis chapter one in mind. This is creation *ex nihilo*—creation out of nothing. This kind of faith must be based upon the inspired, revealed will of God. And how do we know that God has created the universe? We know through creation itself, as Romans tells us by mostly we know by faith in the revealed word of God found in Genesis. When God says that he created everything out of nothing, we can have this level of proof and assurance “that deprives uncertainty of any basis.”

We have a clear definition of faith—*faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen*. We have a clear example of what it means to have faith in God’s word. I can’t prove creation by observational science. No one but God was present at creation so we must accept it by faith. Creation is a good example of faith in action because we must rely solely on God’s word for the answer. Now we move into the first in the list of men and women who were commended for their faith. Now we get real life examples of what a living faith looks like.

Adam and Eve’s son, Abel, is the first on this list. ⁴ *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*

There has been volumes written about why Abel’s sacrifice was pleasing to God and Cain’s was not. There is an ancient Jewish tradition that records the following conversation between Abel and Cain. “It is because my works were better than yours that my offering was received from me with favor, and yours has not been received from you with favor.”³ The most common reason given for the difference between the two brothers is that Abel offered a blood sacrifice and Cain did not. This is a possible explanation but it is far from conclusive. The simple reason is that Abel’s offering was offered by faith. Despite what all of the ancient tradition and commentaries say, all that we know for certain is that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and Cain did not. In Genesis four God said to Cain, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” In God’s words, Cain did not “do what was right.” In other words, he did not have faith. He did not believe what God said to him. Now it may be possible that the content of his faith included the necessity of a blood sacrifice, but we cannot know that for sure.

Abel was the first person to be martyred unto death. He was killed because of his faith. It is unlikely that you and I will be killed for our faith but persecution will come. Paul said in his second letter to Timothy, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” This is one of the marks of true faith. This is basically a promise from Paul—you *will* be persecuted.

Persecution can take many forms. I was the target of some this past week...

I love the last part about Abel in this verse. *And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.* It must have been difficult to have been Abel. He was the first-ever, younger brother. Not only did he have to live in the shadow of his older brother, Cain, but he was the first generation born after his parents were banished from the garden and God’s presence. If you think parenting is tough in our day, if you are Adam and Eve, how do you disciple your children? How do you explain to them that you brought the curse of sin upon your sons and every successive

generation? How do you tell them that death and suffering are all your fault? It's a fascinating scenario when you think about it. It was in that environment that the younger brother Abel presented an offering by faith in God. His faith was in contrast to the lack of faith from his brother but also between that of his parents. We don't know what happened to Adam and Eve but we do know that they were never commended for faith but their son Abel was. His example and commendation of faith lives on and still speaks to us today, six thousand years later. Abel has a legacy of faith. How would you like your life to speak beyond the grave—to testify after you are gone? What do you need to start doing or stop doing *today* so that such a legacy is possible in the future?

The next man on our list is one of the most fascinating and enigmatic characters in all of Scripture. *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.* I think we secretly would like to be lifted up to Heaven like Enoch was. Life is hard and we know it would be far better to be with Jesus and if we had a choice, of course we would rather just be “taken,” swept away into Heaven instead of passing through the doors of death. But unless Christ returns while we are still alive, I don't think we will have an Enoch experience.

Besides, Enoch's life is not recorded for us so that we could go to Heaven like him but so that we could live a life of faith like him. We know almost nothing about Enoch's life but we do know quite a bit about the world in which he lived. Enoch was Noah's great grandfather and in Noah's day, the world had degenerated to about as low as it can get. Genesis chapter six records the level of degradation. *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Where did Noah get such faith in the midst of a perverse generation? I think at least part of the answer is that it was passed down to him from his great grandfather, Enoch. This was a culture of oral history where stories were passed down from generation to generation as families sat around their tents at night by a smoldering fire and told and retold the same stories. Don't you think that Enoch's son, Methuselah told his son, Lamech about the faith of Enoch? After all, one day his father was with him and the next he was translated to Heaven. Methuselah was about three hundred years old at the time so it's not as if he was a small child when it happened. This is not the kind of story you forget. Don't you think that Lamech told his son Noah about the faith of Enoch? Just as the faith of Abel still spoke after he died, so the faith of Enoch spoke after he was taken to Heaven.

This is the power of generational discipleship. Karen and I did not have a faith passed down to us from our parents, but we are blessed to be able to help pass down our faith to our kids and we pray that they will be able to do the same. Enoch had a deep and abiding faith. So sweet and precious was his faith that God spared him from the sin of this world and the process of death. His story is recorded for us so that we can imitate this faith and practice our own form of generational discipleship.

Verse six is an explanatory verse about Abel and by extension, every one of us. *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* When we read this verse, a question that likely pops into our head is this one—Do I have enough faith to please God? I don't want to be displeasing to him but I don't know how much faith is required in order to please God. This is the wrong

question to ask. The important thing here is not the amount of faith but the mere presence of faith. If you have faith you are pleasing to God and if you don't have it, you are not. Every believer possesses faith for without it, you would not be a believer. But this verse and this whole chapter instruct us on how to apply our faith. The lives of these people repeat the same story—those who have true faith in God show it by their actions. Faith without works is dead.

Verse six is not the complete gospel. Many people believe that God, or a god—small “g”—exists and will reward those who seek after him, but most of these people have a false view of God or else a belief in a false god. It's not enough to merely believe that God exists and that he will reward your seeking him, but for the believer, this is part of the evidence of saving faith.

Do you believe that God rewards you for your faith? Some believers still struggle with this idea of rewards, whether heavenly or earthly. But God promises to reward those who seek him. In this chapter you will see this faith-rewards link worked out in the lives of these men and women. Noah, whom we will get to a moment, is one of the clearest examples of faith and reward. He had faith that God was going to judge the earth and so he built an ark. The reward for his faith is obvious—he and his family alone were saved. How was Enoch's faith rewarded? He received the ultimate reward—God himself.

Verse six says that God will reward those who seek him and it makes perfect sense that if you are seeking God your greatest reward is God. What was Abel's reward? His reward was the same as Enoch's but the pathway to his reward was by way of a brutal death. Most depictions of Cain killing Abel involve some kind of blunt force trauma. Cain is almost always pictured beating Abel with some type of club. This is just my opinion, but I think Cain killed Abel with the same knife Abel used to sacrifice the animals for his offering. I think Cain slaughtered Abel in the same way Abel slaughtered the animals in his flock. Cain probably saw that as sweet justice to dispatch his brother with the sacrificial blade. Again, this is just my opinion, but it serves to highlight the brutality of the first murder.

But Abel was not rewarded for being killed. He was rewarded for having faith. We can't control how others respond to the faith we express, but if we have faith, we must express it. It will result in persecution. On rare occasions it will result in death and very often there will be some sort of earthy reward. But in every case, our ultimate reward for seeking God will be God. He is our soul's reward.

Finally, we close this section with Noah. He is by far the most famous of the three mentioned in this chapter. We have a lot of details about Noah but I like the way the author summarizes several chapters in Genesis.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Note the similarities to Genesis 6:9. *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.* Noah walked with God. Of whom is this exact phrase also used?

Genesis 5:22—Enoch walked with God. I'm convinced that Enoch's faith was passed down the generations to Noah.

Verse seven can be broken down to show the process of walking by faith.

1. Promise from God—*Noah, being warned by God*

We must make sure that our faith is in Christ and his specific promises revealed in his word. Many become disappointed with God because they falsely assume that God promised to do such and such and it did not happen. Noah heard directly from the Lord and this is what he trusted in. Be cautious if you are placing your faith in something other than the revealed word of God. For example, in 2000 I thought God was calling me to help plant this church in Viroqua. God does speak to us clearly outside of his word but I did not have any guarantee that I heard him correctly. The church plant could have failed because God didn't really speak to me in the first place. It could have happened that God knew it would fail but called me into this ministry to learn other valuable lessons. And since we have had some measure of success, does it mean that I definitely did hear from the Lord? I hope that this is true, but maybe it has worked out because I worked really hard in my own strength. Or maybe it has succeeded despite me coming here. And since I have been here, three more churches have tried to start in our city. One lasted a few years, one never got past the inception phase and a third is still going. My point is that God may promise you things apart from his word but you can only have 100% faith in the promises contained in his word.

2. Future fulfillment—*concerning events as yet unseen,*

By definition, faith will always involve things unseen and things hoped for, otherwise it would not be faith.

3. Reverent attitude—*in reverent fear*

This is not just the attitude of someone who is building an ark in the midst of world wide judgment. This is the right attitude for every believer all of the time.

4. Faith in action—*constructed an ark*

Faith is action. Faith without any action on your part ceases to be faith. What step of faith is God asking you to take? It doesn't have to be anything "big" like heading to the mission field. For most of us, we need to apply this principle of faith in the small things in our life. It takes faith to love your enemies. It takes faith to develop contentment. It requires faith cultivate joy. If we have faith in the small things we will have faith for the bigger things in life.

5. Reward—*for the saving of his household.*

Noah's reward was that his family was saved from the flood. But why was only Noah's family saved? For whom did Noah build the ark? The common belief is that he built it for anyone who would join him, that he preached about righteousness and invited everyone to enter the safety of the ark with him. This is not at all correct. God told him that the covenant was explicitly with Noah and his seven family members, NOT with anyone else.

¹⁷ For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸ But I will establish my

covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (Ge 6.17-18)

This is precisely what the author of Hebrews recorded. *By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. He accepted that God's word was absolutely faithful even though he could not predict when the flood event might occur. Noah had a faith that persevered through the years.*

God will not ask you to save a remnant of humanity from worldwide judgment but he is asking us to take him at his word.

Rich Maurer
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^f See Gen. 1:1

^g [Rom. 4:17]

^h Gen. 4:4–8; 1 John 3:12

ⁱ Prov. 15:8

^j Gen. 4:10

^k ch. 12:24

^l Gen. 5:22–24; [2 Kgs. 2:11]

^m 1 Chr. 28:9; Jer. 29:12–14; [John 4:24]

ⁿ Gen. 6:13–22; Luke 17:26; 1 Pet. 3:20

^o ver. 1

^p Rom. 4:13; [Gen. 6:9; Ezek. 14:14, 20]

¹ See also:

Jer. 2.11-12

Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?

But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.

¹² *Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD,*

¹³ *for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

Psalm 106:20-22

They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. ²⁰ They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass. ²¹ They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, ²² wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

² and it was created by God's spoken word—rhema, and by the living Word—Logos/Jesus.

³ Lane, p. 334.