Frail Men with Strong Faith

**Hebrews 11:20-22**

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**Introduction:** Have you ever heard someone say something like this; “I don’t go to church because Christians are hypocrites?” If you are like most Christians you might feel a little sting of conviction? Do you secretly wonder if one of your own shortcomings this person might have noticed? But….the charge of “hypocrisy” is used to silence the gospel. It goes something like this: “How dare you say anything about my sin when you are less than perfect yourself!” Most Christians do not understand the charge or the true meaning of it. They say something like this:

* I know that I am not living as perfectly as I should.
* I know that God is displeased with me because of my failures
* I know my weakness makes Christ look bad.
* I know if I was a better Christian then people might come to Christ.

But such reasoning is precisely what turns us into hypocrites. All four of the statements I just read sound good but are in fact Satan’s web of deceit. Let’s start with a definition:

A“hypocrite” is a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion
but acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs. ---Webster

A “hypocrite” **is not** an imperfect or weak person. A “hypocrite” spends the majority of their time trying to pretend not to weak or imperfect. Now…let’s consider our responses to the charge of “hypocrite” once again:

**I know that I am not living as perfectly as I should.** That doesn’t make you a hypocrite. That makes you a redeemed sinner. It is trying to hide it from God and the world that makes us hypocrites.

**Philippians 1:6** being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

**I know that God is displeased with me because of my failures and weakness**. Does God know all things? Does He know the future? Then God knew about your weakness when He died for you! That makes us redeemed sinners. We should never deny our sin to ourselves, God or others. We should confess it instead.

**1 John 1:8-9**  8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**I know my weakness makes Christ look bad**. This is just false! Men do not like Christ anyway and they never will. Our weakness and sin is evidence that the Gospel is true. All men, everywhere are lost and are not seeking God. False religions hoping to find good men. Christ finds sinners and then redeems them.

**Mark 2:17**  17 And hearing *this*, Jesus said to them, "*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

**If I were a better Christian then people might come to Christ.** This is another Satanic fabrication. The gospel has nothing to do with how good you are or how perfectly you follow the perfect Savior. We are witnesses to saving grace not saving self-righteousness.

**1 Timothy 1:15-16**  15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. 16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Today we will look at the faith of three imperfect men..

* One had a largely uneventful life. He was not a great “hero” of the faith and at the end had to be forced by God to do the right thing.
* One lived a life steeped in deception. His life was a rollercoaster of success and failure. His own sons tried to kill their brother and the entire family had to be rescued from certain death by famine.
* The third man was more virtuous…and yet for his trouble received an early life of rejection, hatred, slavery and imprisonment. Although by some standard his later life might be considered good, he nevertheless spent his entire adult life apart from the land and family where he knew he belonged.

Turn in your Bibles and lets read Hebrews 11:20-22 together.

**The Faith of Isaac [Hebrews 11:20]**

**By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come [20]:** Let me read the account of the faith of Abraham, but let’s also realize that Isaac was fully aware of what was going on. After traveling three days to get to Mount Moriah…

**Genesis 22:6-13**  6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." 13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Although the Scripture implies strongly that Isaac believed that God would provide, it was Abraham’s faith that prevailed on that day. And here is something every parent should remember; Trust in God cannot be passed down to our children.

So, when Isaac was about 40 years old he married Rebecca, but Rebecca was barren. History is about to repeat itself. God had promised Abraham a mighty nation, but gave him no children. When He finally did give a son, He asked for him to be given back. Isaac was that child and now, he too, is facing the possibility of no children. Again…God would be the hero. God was working His plan not Abraham and not Isaac.

**Genesis 25:21**  21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.

And this is the last positive thing that is said about Isaac in Scripture until our verse here in Hebrews 11. Here is a brief account.

* Rebekah looked to the Lord, but there is no record that Isaac did.

**Genesis 25:22**  22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

* God gave her clear instructions about the future of the twins, but Isaac did not know them or did not take them seriously.

**Genesis 25:23**  23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

* Isaac favored Esau because of what he could do for him. He was more interested in his own life than in the glory of God.

**Genesis 25:28** Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

* Esau was a profane man, totally committed to his own comfort and desires. He was the one that Isaac preferred. Two men, direct descendants of Abraham and inheritors of the promises of God, become totally self-indulged.

So… why is Isaac included in this list of “men and women of faith?” Isaac wanted his first born to be the heir to the promises and he also trusted God to bring the promises of Abraham to pass. God overruled his will and caused him to bless his second son while wanting to bless his first. But… It was still a prayer of trust in God’s promise.

**Genesis 27:28-29**  28 May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness-- an abundance of grain and new wine. 29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."

When Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau he expressed his faith in God. He fully trusted that God would do with his son exactly what God had said He would do.

So why do we still find it so remarkable that Isaac gets credit for faith? Because we are accustomed to thinking of faith incorrectly. We think “having faith” means something we do. This is just simply wrong! God justified Isaac because he believed and trusted Him and not because he was a paragon of virtue in this life.

Isaac actually stood in the way of God. The blessing was the work of God. God had previously determined to give it to Jacob. Rebecca knew this because she had inquired of the Lord. Isaac could have known it that way, but he chose instead to force God to reveal it to him this way. Once revealed however, Isaac accepted it fully and agreed with God that this is the way the blessing should have gone. He refused to try to take it back or to curse Jacob. It is never too late to trust God and His word. There is nothing you have ever done that God cannot forgive in Christ. The joy of being loved and embraced by God does not come to you by your perfect behavior or by hiding all your shortcomings from others. It comes through simple trust in the character and word of your God.

TRUE FAITH HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH OUR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD. IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH GOD’S FAITHFULNESS TOWARD US.

**Hebrews 11:20** 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come.

**The Faith of Jacob [Hebrews 11:21]**

**By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff [21]:** Jacob goes down in history as the man who stole the birthright and the blessing from his brother…but is that really true? Did Jacob take what was not rightfully his? In order to answer this question let’s have a look at the story and determine the facts.

* God had promised the blessing to Jacob before he was born. (Gen. 25:23)
* Esau did not value it in the least and even sold it to Jacob for a bowl of stew

**Genesis 25:32-33**32 Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what *use* then is the birthright to me?" 33 And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

* God caused the blessing to be passed to Jacob in spite of Isaac’s determination for it to go another way. **BUT…**

Does this excuse the conniving of Rebekah and Jacob? The deceit of the stew and the hairy skins on Jacob’s arms? And what about the lying? Jacob lied repeatedly to Isaac in order to gain the blessing.

Then there were Jacob’s trials. He too was deceived and ended up with two wives when his desire had been for only one. He listened to the women when they gave him their handmaidens so that they could have children. The domestic life was a total failure. His father-in-law did everything to keep him from prospering for 20 years. His beloved Rachael finally gave him two sons, but Joseph was apparently killed by a wild animal and Rachael died giving birth to Benjamin.

He had been given the promises, blessings and birthright from his father, but struggled throughout his own life with every conceivable obstacle and failure. This is what he told Pharaoh when he entered Egypt.

**Genesis 47:9**  9 So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning."

How is it then that Jacob is named as a man of faith at the end of his life?

Consider the faith of Jacob and not his failed life. Things have gone steadily downhill for Him. At the time he blesses Joseph’s sons there is not a single descendent of Abraham living in the land of promise. And yet he confidently and boldly passes on this blessing to the sons of Joseph without the slightest evidence that it will happen.

**Genesis 48:21-22**  1 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 "I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

**Hebrews 11:21**  21 By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

**The Faith of Joseph [Hebrews 11:22]**

**By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones [22]:** Joseph was going to die without ever seeing the land of promise again. He was going to die without any indication that Israel would return. They were trapped in Egypt. But He trusted God to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac and his father Jacob.

**Genesis 50:24-25**  24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

Joseph’s **“faith”** was that he believed God and considered Him trustworthy. He did not require any evidence that God would act. God’s character and word were enough for Him. He believed God.

**Hebrews 11:22**  22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.

**CONCLUSION:** This is not just an Old Testament story about faith. The promise these men believed was the birth of the Messiah who would redeem Israel and the nations from the slavery of sin.

**Galatians 3:16**  16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Men of faith have always believed that God would keep His promise to redeem Israel from her sin and weakness. Even when God gave them the law of Moses it was trust in “the promise” that justified men in God’s eyes.

**Galatians 3:18**  18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

…and the promise is Jesus Christ. Jesus is God the Son who came personally to redeem Israel and all other men as well. He came for you.

A person either trusts Christ alone for their salvation or they trust in themselves. A clever mixture of self-righteousness and faith is not faith.

**Titus 3:4-5**  4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

**Faith is about God! It is never about you!** Stop worrying if you have enough of it. Quit hiding your own failures and sins. Your trials and shortcomings do not define your faith. Neither do your blessings, successes and strengths. It is not about how we perform or the circumstances of our lives.

**Faith is not a tool we use to get what we want.**

**It is the tool God uses to get what He wants.**

And what God wants is you. You **are not** invited to be a better person. **You are** invited to believe that God is totally good, totally full of mercy for you in your present state. He proved that by sending Christ, His own Son to take your penalty for sin.

**John 3:16-17**  16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

You are invited to change your mind about what faith is. Faith is trusting God and believing His Word. And believing God pleases Him totally.

**Hebrews 11:6**  6 And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

With faith it is possible to please God. He who comes to God must believe He exists and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him. Just look at the people God accepted because of their faith….

* Isaac failed to perceive or do what God wanted but still believed Him when He promised something.
* Jacob lived a difficult life fraught with his own sins, weaknesses and trials, but still believed that God would do what He said He would do.
* Joseph suffered trials and experienced great success, but was never given the opportunity to live in the promised land. Nevertheless, he too, believed that God was trustworthy and would keep His word to Israel.

You are doing exactly what pleases Him when you trust Him with your very life and eternal soul. He said He washed you clean in the blood of Christ. He promised never to leave you. He assured you that He sent the Holy Spirit to live inside you and to sustain and strengthen you. He vowed to return for you and take you to be with Him. These promises are not empty to you…are they! No! They are all going to come true. Our trials in this life do not nullify them. Our failures and sins cannot cancel them. Will you resolve today to always trust what your merciful God has said to us.

**Psalm 103:2-8**  2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; 3 Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; 4 Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; 5 Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle. 6 The LORD performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel. 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.