

## **Salvation Has Always Been a Gift From God**

Last time we saw Paul use Abraham as an example of salvation through faith and we've not seen the last of that in chapter 4. But as a brief review before getting into verses 6-8, let me read the first 5 verses of Romans 4 as they appear in the modern language translation of The Message, Romans 4:1-5:

*So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? If Abraham, **by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it.** But the story we're given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. **He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own.**" If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something **ONLY** God can do, and **you trust him to do it—you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked—well, that trusting-him-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, by God. A Sheer gift.***

So we see that Abraham was saved by faith and not anything he accomplished on his own. Now after using Abraham as the cornerstone for his message to the Romans, Paul is going to use their other great hero, David. Let's read Romans 4:6-8:

*King David spoke of this, describing the happiness of an **undeserving sinner who is declared to be righteous:***  
 7 "Oh, what joy for those whose **disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.**  
 8 Yes, what joy for those whose **sin is no longer counted against them by the Lord.**"

The truly blessed person is the one who is forgiven of their sin. The verses we've just read are grounded in Psalm 32:1,2:

*A psalm of David. Oh, **what joy for those whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!***  
 2 Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin, **whose lives are lived in complete honesty!**

When David wrote this Psalm, he knew guilt. He had been involved in adultery and he had been involved in murder. In Psalm 51, he describes his pain. He says in Psalm 32 that his life juices dried up, and that's what happens when guilt occurs. Saliva, one of the life juices, dries up. Anxiety creates pressure in the head that restricts the flow of blood, another of the life juices. The lymphatic system is also affected, as is the nervous system. David began to be old before his time, and he began to ache in his joints. Guilt does that.

We learned earlier that Abraham lived about 500 years before God gave the Law to Moses. David lived about 500 years after God gave the Law to Moses. David shows us that God redeems people in the same way as He did with Abraham, by faith. Nothing has changed in that regard from Abraham to David, nor did it change when Christ came, and it hasn't changed from then until now. Always, at all times, redemption is a matter of faith resulting in imputed righteousness.

In verse 5 Paul says God justifies the ungodly in that their faith is counted for righteousness, and here David is basically saying the same thing: that God does not count his sin against him and that righteousness is not dependent on his behavior because the righteousness that he is given because of his faith is not his, but rather it is the righteousness of Christ. Listen to what the sons of Korah wrote in Psalm 84:1-4:

*How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty.*

*2 I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God.*

*3 **Even the sparrow finds a home there, and the swallow builds her nest and raises her young— at a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God!***

*4 How happy are those who can live in your house, always singing your praises.*

You might find this Psalm a little confusing without understanding some Old Testament cultural background. Here we see a person who seeks fellowship with God, experiences intimacy with God, and who is known by God and who knows God. A person who has entered into relationship and made things right with God, and paints a marvelous picture of that in these verses.

What's the meaning here? It's much easier to comprehend when you know that a sparrow is the biblical symbol of worthlessness. You could buy sparrows very cheaply. But in a right relationship with God, the one who is **worthless** becomes **worthy**, eternally valuable. The **sparrow** has found a house.

The **swallow** is the symbol of restlessness, but here we see that the swallow has found a nest in the presence of God. **The worthless become eternally valuable and the restless find rest.** God looks at the sinner and the ungodly, and when they reach out **in faith** to embrace the redeemer, Jesus Christ, knowing that in Him alone is their hope for salvation, God accepts them as believers, declares them righteous, and erases the record of their sin. That sin is transferred to Jesus who bore the penalty for that sin on the cross. Jesus' righteousness is therefore transferred to the person who has confessed their sin and believed. This is the divine transaction known as salvation.

The Bible says that our sins, if not forgiven, will be the cause of our going to Hell forever and will be the cause of tremendous anxiety while we are here on this earth.

Psychologist's offices are kept busy with people who struggle with guilt. People who can't find release from the things they've either done or think they've done in the past,

and who may also be worried about the judgment which awaits them for what they've done.

For the believer, however, all your sins are forgiven; every single one of them is erased from your heavenly account. Just like the ledger below shows:

<u>Ron's Ledger WITHOUT Jesus</u>		<u>Ron's Ledger WITH Jesus</u>	
Sin 1		<b>R</b>	
Sin 2		<b>I</b>	
Sin 3		<b>G</b>	
Sin 4		<b>H</b>	
Sin 5		<b>T</b>	
Sin 6		<b>E</b>	
.....		<b>O</b>	
.....		<b>U</b>	
Sin 965		<b>S</b>	
<u>Sin 4,322</u>			
Total Sins:	<b><u>TOO MANY</u></b>	Total Sins:	<b><u>NONE</u></b>
Destination:	<b>HELL</b>	Destination:	<b>HEAVEN</b>

So Romans 4:7 assures us that our sins are erased or put out of sight of God. Just how far does He send them away? Psalm 103:12 tells us: *“He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west.”* Do you remember what John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus coming to be baptized? *“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world “* (John 1:29).

Abraham was saved because Jesus would one day go to the cross. David was saved in the same way. The death of Jesus on the cross was for the sins of all who ever believed God and looked for a redeemer before Jesus came, and for all who believed in Him as a redeemer since He came. Jesus died to save all.

As we move on to Romans 4:9, we begin to see what the Jewish people considered a very big issue regarding this concept of *“justification by faith alone.”* Let's read Romans 4:9-12:

*Now then, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it for Gentiles, too? Well, what about Abraham? We have been saying **he was declared righteous by God because of his faith.***

*10 But how did his faith help him? Was he declared righteous only after he had been circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? The answer is that **God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later!***

*11 **The circumcision ceremony was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised.** So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. **They are made right with God by faith.***

*12 And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, **but only if they have the same kind of faith** Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

**Circumcision** was a sign of identity to the Jew. The Jews are asking Paul, “*what part do religious rites and ceremonies play in salvation?*” So the big issue beginning in verse 9 is now circumcision. Basically the Jews are asking, “*Look, if you’re saved by faith, then why did God tell us to be circumcised? What’s the meaning of circumcision? What’s the point if it doesn’t guarantee entrance into Heaven?*” Many people in the church today feel exactly the same way about baptism. They think that if you’ve been baptized, you’re going to Heaven. That’s just not so, and if you’ve been paying attention, you already know why. Neither circumcision nor baptism were ever intended as a free ticket to Heaven. Each was intended to be an outward sign of an inner commitment. But it would probably be helpful for you to know where they got the idea of salvation by surgery. They got it from Genesis 17:1-14:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; serve me faithfully and live a blameless life.*

*2 I will make a covenant with you, by which **I will guarantee to make you into a mighty nation.**”*

*3 At this, Abram fell face down in the dust. Then God said to him,*

*4 “This is my covenant with you: **I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations!***

*5 What’s more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations.*

*6 I will give you **millions of descendants** who will represent many nations. Kings will be among them!*

*7 “I will continue this everlasting covenant between us, generation after generation. It will continue between me and your offspring forever. And **I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you.***

*8 Yes, I will give all this land of Canaan to you and to your offspring forever. And I will be their God.*

*9 “Your part of the agreement,” God told Abraham, “is to **obey the terms***

*of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility.*

*10 This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised;*

*11 the flesh of his foreskin must be cut off. **This will be a sign that you and they have accepted this covenant.***

*12 Every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family, but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased.*

*13 All must be circumcised. **Your bodies will thus bear the mark of my everlasting covenant.***

*14 Anyone who refuses to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for violating the covenant.”*

Because of these verses the Jews believed that no circumcised Jewish male would ever go to Hell. What Paul is trying to tell them is that circumcision was just a sign that the people promised to obey God. And it was part of the Old Testament Mosaic Covenant that merely pointed toward the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. With the arrival of Jesus, the promise of God that all sin will be dealt with is fulfilled. The ceremonies and rituals that were performed as signs that their sin was forgiven by a coming Messiah were no longer necessary. Anyone that wanted to stay in the old Jewish system would in effect be rejecting Jesus as that Savior, and anyone who does that has the impossible task of keeping God's Law on their own, which is just that, impossible. This is exactly what Paul was addressing when he wrote to the Galatians in Galatians 5:1-10:

*So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and **don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.***

*2 Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, **then Christ cannot help you.***

*3 I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, **you must obey all of the regulations in the whole law of Moses.***

*4 For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, **you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.***

*5 But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive everything promised to us **who are right with God through faith.***

*6 For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised. **What is important is faith expressing itself in love.***

*7 You were getting along so well. Who has interfered with you to hold you back from following the truth?*

*8 It certainly isn't God, for he is the one who called you to freedom.*

*9 But it takes only one wrong person among you to infect all the others—a little yeast spreads quickly through the whole batch of dough!*

*10 I am trusting the Lord to bring you back to believing as I do about these things. God will judge that person, whoever it is, who has been troubling and confusing you.*

Also we want to read with you all of Galatians 6 from the Message, a contemporary translation that we recommend using very selectively as a supplement to your other translations. In this case we found the translation of the entire chapter very meaningful and would like to share it with you:

*Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, **forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself.** You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and **reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens,** and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived. Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. **Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.** Be very sure now, you who have been trained to a self-sufficient maturity, that you enter into a generous common life with those who have trained you, **sharing all the good things that you have and experience.** Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. **What a person plants, he will harvest.** The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life. So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time **we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit.** Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, **let us work for the benefit of all,** starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith. Now, in these last sentences, I want to emphasize in the bold scrawls of my personal handwriting the immense importance of what I have written to you. These people who are attempting to force the ways of circumcision on you **have only one motive:** They want an easy way to look good before others, lacking the courage to live by a faith that shares Christ's suffering and death. All their talk about the law is gas. **They themselves don't keep the law!** And they are **highly selective in the laws they do observe.** They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast of their success in recruiting you to their side. That is contemptible! For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. Because of that Cross, I have been crucified in relation to the world, **set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns** that they dictate. Can't you see the central issue in all this? It is not what you and I do—submit to circumcision, reject circumcision. It is what God is doing, and he is creating something totally new, a free life! **All who walk by this standard are the true Israel of God**—his chosen people. Peace and mercy on them!*



*Quite frankly, I don't want to be bothered anymore by these disputes. I have far more important things to do—the serious living of this faith. I bear in my body scars from my service to Jesus. May what our Master Jesus Christ gives freely be deeply and personally yours, my friends. Oh, yes!*

Now, you may be thinking, “*What relevance does all this circumcision stuff have to my life today? We're not Israel.*” Well, some of you may have figured it out while reading Galatians 6, but if you haven't, here's the bottom line. Many people today are basing their salvation on some infant baptism, or some confirmation, or some adult baptism, or some communion involvement, or some religious rite or ceremony. There are many people who call themselves Christians in our society, who would even call themselves *evangelicals* (being in agreement with the Christian gospel; emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual),<sup>1</sup> who actually believe their children are secured eternally by infant baptism. Many have placed their trust in some other kind of religious ceremony. Even though it's not the same circumcision the Jews practiced, it's the very same type of thing. All religious rites have the same value as circumcision. Such rites can only be meaningful as an outward expression of an inner commitment. The religious ceremony by itself, without faith, cannot save anyone.

Consider the sacramental system that was originated by the Catholic Church and which has also been adopted to one degree or another by a number of Protestant denominations. **Sacraments**, according to the Catholic Church, have the power to grant forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life to people without an expression of faith by that person. Do you know why Catholics go to Mass? Do you know why they want extreme unction, penance, confession, and baptism of infants? Because the Catholic Church has told them it imparts regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The issue **is not a person's** heart but the ritual of the act of the sacrament. For those who may not be familiar with the Catholic sacraments and their meaning, let's briefly touch on each of them:

### **1) Infant Baptism**

By being baptized as a baby, you are saved and given the guarantee of eternal life. According to the Catholic church, baptism is essential for salvation.

### **2) The Eucharist or Mass**

This involves participating in the ceremony of eating bread and drinking from the cup. Many churches call this ceremony communion. The benefit of this ceremony, according to the Catholic Church, is a union of the person with Christ. In other words, when you eat the bread and drink the wine, they believe you are joined with Christ and your sin

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. 1996, c1993. Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. Includes index. (10th ed.). Merriam-Webster: Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.

removed. It is also stated that this ceremony is essential for salvation.

### **3) Confirmation**

The sacrament of confirmation completes the sacrament of baptism. If baptism is the sacrament of re-birth to a new and supernatural life, confirmation is the sacrament of maturity and coming of age. Whereas the priest administers baptism, the bishop administers confirmation by laying his hands on the head of the person. In this act the person is said to receive the Holy Spirit, strengthening him/her to live up to his/her profession and tell what he/she believes.<sup>2</sup>

### **4) Confession or Penance**

Roman Catholicism teaches that Christ forgives sins through the priest at confession or penance. The outward sign that the confessor has been forgiven is the statement of absolution by the priest. He has the authority through Christ's statement in John 20:23. In this the priest has the power to forgive or not forgive sins.<sup>3</sup>

#### **John 20:23 (NAS):**

*"If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."*

The Catholic Church took a great deal of liberty in **misrepresenting** the meaning of this verse. Forgiveness of **sins** is one of the major benefits of the death of Jesus. It is the essence of the New Covenant. The forgiveness of sins is the prominent feature of the preaching in the Book of Acts. Jesus was giving the apostles (and by extension, the Church) the privilege of announcing heaven's terms regarding **how a person can receive forgiveness**. If one believes in Jesus, then you can confidently say that the person has been forgiven. If a person rejects Jesus' sacrifice, then you can confidently advise them that they are not forgiven.<sup>4</sup>

### **5) Holy Orders**

The sacrament of holy orders involves ordination to the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon, conferring "on a man the spiritual power and grace to sanctify (free from sin) others." The Sacrament of Holy Orders confers upon the soul of the man ordained a special indelible mark or character of Jesus Christ which will remain for all eternity."<sup>5</sup>

### **6) Marriage**

The sacrament of marriage is a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. The Council of Florence declared in 1439: "*A triple good attaches to matrimony. The first is the begetting of children and their education to the worship of God. The second is the faithfulness which each spouse owes to the other. The third is the indissolubility of*

<sup>2</sup> Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill., p.533.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.534.

<sup>4</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

<sup>5</sup> Enns, P. P. 1997, c1989. *The Moody handbook of theology*. Moody Press: Chicago, Ill.



*marriage because it represents the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church.*"<sup>6</sup> The Roman Catholic Church emphasizes the permanence of marriage; divorce is forbidden. It also rejects abortion or artificial birth control. Vatican II emphasized the necessity of developing love in marriage and that marriage does not exist solely for procreation.<sup>7</sup>

### **7) Extreme Unction**

"One becomes by extreme unction like the risen Christ because it is given to the dying as a sign of the glory to come" ...the holy anointing makes the man or woman who stands at the threshold of eternity and loyally cooperates with the grace of the sacrament ready to enter directly into Heaven.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic Church is maintaining that by ceremonies, rituals, and certain rites duly prescribed and carried out in the proper prescribed method according to tradition, you can impart to someone such things as redemption, salvation, righteousness, grace, and holiness. I'm not singling out the Catholic church just to pick on them alone, but they do have more sacraments than most Protestant denominations. But let's be perfectly clear; this kind of thing exists in most church denominations to one degree or another. And both Catholic and Protestant positions are no different from what we hear and what we see in studying the Jewish view of circumcision. It's all a lie conceived by religious leaders to enhance their power and control over people.

So Paul is dealing with a much bigger picture here than we might understand when we first read the verses in chapter 4. He is dealing with the issue which makes it clear that religious rites and ceremonies do not provide a person with salvation and eternal life in Heaven. So let's go back to Romans 4:9 and look more closely at how Paul deals with this matter:

*Now then, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it for Gentiles, too? Well, what about Abraham? We have been saying **he was declared righteous by God because of his faith.***

Remember that this **blessing** is the blessing referred to in Romans 4:6-8. Who is this blessedness for? The Jew would claim that it was only for the circumcised Jew and that no uncircumcised person could ever share in salvation. But verse 9 tells us that Abraham was declared righteous because of his **faith**. If God blesses those who believe, as He did Abraham, is this blessing then applicable to everybody who believes? Based on the first 8 verses of Romans 4, there is no other conclusion that could be reached. But the Jew would say, "*Even if I concede that a person is saved by faith, it could only be a person who was circumcised. No uncircumcised person could ever receive God's salvation.*"

Such thinking is typical of many Protestant churches as well as the Roman Catholic churches today. Some of you who may come from one of these backgrounds might have been taught that salvation is based on baptism, confirmation, or the Eucharist. Paul's

<sup>6</sup> Rahner, ed., *Teaching of the Catholic Church*, p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> Abbott, ed., *Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 252-55.

<sup>8</sup> Rahner, ed., *Teaching of the Catholic Church*, p. 331.

answer to the question raised in verse 9 is masterful, and we find it in Romans 4:10:

*But how did his faith help him (that is, Abraham)?<sup>9</sup> Was he declared righteous only **after he had been circumcised**, or was it **before he was circumcised**? The answer is that **God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later!***

Were you looking for some good news this morning? Well, there it is. **Abraham was uncircumcised when God declared him righteous.** Abraham was uncircumcised when God granted him salvation and eternal life. This is the same as saying he was unbaptised; it's the same as saying Abraham was unceremonialized. Now you're asking, "*How do you know that?*" Let's turn back to Genesis 17:23-27 for clarification:

*On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and every other male in his household and circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, exactly as God had told him.*

**24 Abraham was ninety-nine years old at that time,**

**25 and Ishmael his son was thirteen.**

**26 Both were circumcised the same day,**

**27 along with all the other men and boys of the household, whether they were born there or bought as servants.**

Just as a point of information, Abraham's son, Ishmael, was born to Abraham's wife's servant, Hagar, because his wife, Sarah, was unable to conceive. This occurred before the miracle child, Isaac, was born to Abraham and Sarah, the child that God had promised. Now, Ishmael was 13 years old when all this happened. When God made His covenant with Abraham and God declared Abraham righteous, Ishmael had not yet been born. So Abraham would not have been circumcised for another fourteen years after being declared righteous by God. This can be confirmed by turning back a few pages to Genesis 15:1-6:

*Afterward the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."*

*2 But Abram replied, "O Sovereign Lord, what good are all your blessings when **I don't even have a son**? Since I don't have a son, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth.*

*3 **You have given me no children**, so one of my **servants** will have to be my heir."*

*4 Then the Lord said to him, "No, your servant will not be your heir, for **you will have a son of your own** to inherit everything I am giving you."*

*5 Then the Lord brought Abram outside beneath the night sky and told him, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your*

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<sup>9</sup> Parentheses added.

*descendants will be like that—too many to count!”*  
*6 And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith.*

**Abraham was declared righteous years before he was circumcised.** So we see here that an uncircumcised Gentile with an idolatrous background is saved based on his faith and trust in the Word of God. **We can reason from that and say that no religious rite or ceremony was ever intended by God to provide righteousness to anybody ever.** It is only **faith** in God and what He has done and is doing through Jesus Christ, that allows us to receive salvation through His grace.

What then is the purpose of circumcision? Why was that necessary? Paul answers in Romans 4:11:

*The circumcision ceremony was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are made right with God by faith.*

Circumcision was a sign and a seal of the righteousness provided by God. There's a difference between a sign and the real thing. If you're driving to Chicago and see a sign that says "**Chicago**" along with an arrow, you don't pull over next to the sign and say, "We're here." A sign points you to something. **Circumcision was a sign that pointed to something.** What was that something?

1) Circumcision was a physical mark to identify God's people, the Jews. In fact, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, Paul had Timothy circumcised because it would give him access in his mission to the Jews. They would accept him because he was one of them.

2) But far more than anything else, circumcision was a spiritual sign. Circumcision was to be a symbol to people that what is on the outside is what God wants on the inside. He wants to cut away the sinful covering on our hearts, He wants to cut away the foreskin of your heart. And every circumcision is a guarantee that God will provide salvation to the person with the circumcised heart, to those who believe and trust in Him and what He's done through Jesus Christ.

How did the Jews in the Old Testament times know this? Because God told them through His prophets. Deuteronomy 30:6 (NRSV):

*Moreover, the Lord your God will **circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants**, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.*

Here it is in the Jews own *Pentateuch* (the first 5 books of the Bible) because that was the way God always wanted it to be, and every circumcised child was to be a reminder of

that.

**Psalm 51:6:**

*But you desire honesty **from the heart**, so you can teach me **to be wise in my inmost being**.*

**Jeremiah 4:3,4:**

*For thus says the Lord to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.  
4 **Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts**, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

Did the Jews know what God expected of them? You bet they did. Every child was a testimony that the heart needed to be circumcised. What about today? When we take communion, when we come to the Lord's table, does that save us? No, but do you know what it does do? It is a **sign that points (- ->)** to the death of Jesus and that **God wants to save us and is ready to save us**. When we participate in the act of communion, we are symbolizing Christ's act of redemption, and that without Christ one cannot be saved. That's why Scripture warns people who are not saved not to partipate in communion. God does not look favorably on people who do that. If you think that by taking communion, you are automatically saved, then you're doing exactly the same thing that many of the Jews did with circumcision, and you are seriously mistaken. In fact you're trodding the path that leads to eternal Hell.

Baptism is in the same category. When you dunk somebody in the water and they come up out of the water, that is a sign that points to a union between that person and Christ in both His death and resurrection. You die to sin and rise to new a new life filled with the Holy Spirit. Let's go back for just a moment to Romans 2:28, 29 (NRSV):

*For a person is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**, nor is true circumcision something external and **physical**.*

***29 Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the **heart**—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.***

It's the heart that God has always been after.

So based on the second part of Romans 4:11, Abraham is not just the father of the Jews who believe but also of all those who are not Jews who believe. Abraham is the father of everyone who believes. We all have the same kind of salvation Abraham had if we believe. The model for everyone's salvation is Abraham. If you don't believe God and Jesus Christ, you can be circumcised, baptized, communion-ized, confirmed-ized, Eucharist-ized, penance-ized, and extreme unction-ized, and it won't do you a bit of good. And if you haven't gone through any of those ceremonies but believe in God and

Jesus Christ's death on the cross for your sins, that's all you need to do to be declared righteous by God and receive salvation from God. Look at Philippians 3: 1-9:

*Whatever happens, dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord give you joy. I never get tired of telling you this. I am doing this for your own good.*

*2 Watch out for those dogs, those wicked men and their evil deeds, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.*

*3 For we who worship God in the Spirit are the only ones who are truly circumcised. We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us.*

*4 Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!*

*5 For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.*

*6 And zealous? Yes, in fact, **I harshly persecuted the church.** And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.*

*7 I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.*

*8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ*

*9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but **I TRUST CHRIST TO SAVE ME. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.***

Have you made the faith commitment necessary to be given this righteousness from God? Have you told God that you're a sinner in need of a Savior and that you believe that Savior to be Jesus Christ? Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sin and for mine? Do you trust completely in God's promises? If you do, God has granted you salvation and the assurance of eternal life in Heaven because of that faith. If you haven't made that commitment, why not do it right now. We'll remain silent for 60 seconds so that you might have an opportunity to do that, and if you've already done it, take this time to pray for those who have not yet done so.