

Abraham: The Old Testament Pattern of Saving Faith, Part 2

Scripture: Romans 4:9–12

Code: 80-347

Well, as you know, we are enjoying a look at the wonderful center section, as it were, the heart of Paul's great epistle to the Romans. This, of course, is the definitive text of the New Testament on the subject of justification and salvation and therefore it is one in which we must be familiar. This section runs, really, from chapter 3 to chapter 5 and then in chapter 6 moves in to the issues of sanctification that are inseparably connected to justification. But for us, we're looking at chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Let me take you back to chapter 3 verses 21 through the first part of verse 25, to set in place the issue at hand. Verse 21, "Now apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation or satisfaction in His blood through faith."

Now just looking back at that, apart from the Law, verse 21, through faith for all who believe, verse 22. Verse 24, "Being justified as a gift by His grace." Verse 25, "God publicly displays Christ as a satisfaction in His blood through faith." Again, this is the core statement by Paul that a man or a woman is made right with God by grace through faith, not works.

Not it just needs to be said probably in a very general way that all religion, all religion is designed to offer a right relationship with whatever God is espoused in that religion. All religion is designed to get the follower on the right side of God, to remove them from the bad side and put them on the good side. That's what religion is for...at least that's what it offers itself to accomplish, when, in fact, it cannot do that. But nonetheless that is the selling point.

How does a person get on the right side of God? How does a person escape divine judgment and enter into divine blessing? All religions offer some formula, some means supposedly to make that happen. And, of course, none of them can apart from the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Here we find that the only way that a person can be made right with God is apart from works, apart from anything that person does simply through faith, the gift of grace is given. When a person places genuine faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation, forgiveness and righteousness comes as a gift.

Now that is the essence of this marvelous section of Scripture, a declaration that the sinner who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ is declared righteous. This is a judicial declaration. Sometimes we say it's a forensic declaration. It is a legal declaration because the penalty was paid by Christ, the Judge is satisfied, and the Judge therefore imputes or credits His own righteousness to the account of the believing sinner. This is at the very foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now Paul wants to give us an illustration of this and so in chapter 4 he selects Abraham. The best illustration of the truth, that salvation is by grace through faith apart from works is Abraham. And Paul

selects him to make his point very personal. And by the way, as a footnote, there are people today who are coming up with a kind of new view that says there's no such thing as personal conversion...there's no such thing as personal salvation, turning on its head the conviction of the church since the New Testament era. That there is a kind of collective people of God who are all institutionally a part of the Kingdom through baptism. But there's no such thing as personal salvation.

Well Paul would have a hard time with that because his model for salvation here is a person. His model for salvation is one man by the name of Abraham. And he is an illustration that salvation comes not by works, not by maintaining the Law, not by some ritual or ceremony or rite, but simply by faith. That is his point.

Now the Jews had developed a system in which there were all kinds of personal acts both moral and ceremonial by which they would achieve salvation. It's amazing how people make fetishes, how they make images, how they develop objects, formulas, rituals that become a way in which they can earn or achieve their salvation.

I remember being in the largest cathedral in North America, a Catholic cathedral in the city of Montreal, and I watched people on their knees climbing up hundreds of stairs, wooden stairs, to ascend to the pinnacle of this place, go into the cathedral and go to a shrine that is there to a little priest who died a long time ago and his bones are there with a view to touching his bones, such a pilgrimage on one's knees and the touching of his bones gains merit for salvation. People do that. They develop those kinds of things. Even the Jews had done that in their history.

When Hezekiah came along in 2 Kings 18, brought about a revival in Israel, one of the things that he did was smash the brazen serpent that had been lifted up in the wilderness as a point of contact for faith, people turning to God and being healed from the snake bites if they would put their trust in God and God alone. When the Jews had taken that simple symbol and turned it into a fetish. They were actually believing had some kind of spiritual powers. One of the things that Hezekiah did was smash it because the Jewish people were burning incense to that bronze image.

I have been at the shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico and I've watched people crawl long, long distances on their knees. I've been to the steps in Rome, the church...the very church that Luther tried to ascend on his knees to earn his salvation. All these things prevent salvation, they do not accomplish it because there's a statement in chapter 4 verse 5 that is so foundational, "But to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." The statement that God justifies the ungodly, turns all works/righteousness systems inside out. God does not justify the godly, He justifies the ungodly. Salvation comes to those who recognize their ungodliness. That is the difference in the story of the prodigal son and his brother and the loving father. The one who received the robe, which could be an emblem of righteousness, was the one who recognized his wretchedness. The older brother who had no sense of his own sinfulness received no such gift from the father because God is in the business of justifying, declaring righteous, granting righteousness and forgiveness and salvation to the ungodly.

And Paul chooses Abraham as a model of this and breaks the chapter in to three sections, really. First he talks about the fact that Abraham was saved by faith, not by works. We saw that in the opening section down through verse 8. In the middle section, Abraham was saved by grace not by Law. And in the final section, Abraham was saved by divine power, not human effort. In all three sections, looking at it from a different angle, Paul is basically saying the same thing. We've already

looked at the first one, verses 1 to 8. Abraham was justified by faith not works.

Now let's look at the second one. Abraham was justified by grace, not Law....by grace, not Law. And the key to this is really in verse 16, although we won't get there tonight. But verse 16 is the key idea. "For this reason, it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, Jews, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all."

Salvation comes not to the Jews only because they have the Law and therefore can keep the Law, but salvation comes to anyone who follows the pattern of faith which is exhibited by Abraham. Here we find in this section that God is a God of grace. Faith meets grace. Faith in accordance with grace. God saves with the absolutely free favor that He chooses to give undeserving sinners. We know this. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, for by grace are you saved through faith. All salvation is a work of God's grace, not man's earning. Abraham, of course, is the excellent illustration of this great truth.

Look at it this way. If the greatest man in the old dispensation, if the greatest man in the Old Testament by Jewish testimony had to deny all works, had to deny all Law-keeping as a way to be right with God, if the greatest man in the Old Testament had to receive salvation and righteousness by faith alone through grace alone, then any other lesser man is going to have to follow the same path. If there is no salvation for Abraham by law-keeping, it is also impossible for all other men. This is precisely what Paul is demonstrating in the story of Abraham.

Now what about religious rites? Are not they important? Don't they play some kind of role? If you go back to chapter 3 verse 1, Paul with his imaginary adversary poses the questions that he then answers, and one of the questions is, "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Why have a rite like circumcision? Why have a ritual? Why have that kind of ceremony if it doesn't have any purpose?" The Jews believed that circumcision of all the rites and all the rituals was the most important. They felt that circumcision was a surgical act that secured their righteousness. They actually believed that.

According to one of the sources that I found on the Jewish teaching on circumcision, they say this. "The fierce fanaticism with which the Jews insisted upon the rite of circumcision, is vividly brought out in the book of Jubilees, this is what it says. This law of circumcision is for all generations forever and there is no circumcision of the time and no passing over one day out of the eight days for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tables. And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham. For he belongs to the children of destruction. Nor is there moreover any sign on him that he is the Lord's but he is destined to be destroyed and slain from the earth and to be rooted out of the earth for he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God. So absolute is circumcision as a mark of God's favor that if an Israelite has practiced idolatry, his circumcision must first be removed before he can go down to Gehenna."

In other words, if you've been circumcised and you're an idolater, you're still going to go to heaven. If you have been circumcised, the only way you can go to hell was to somehow have your circumcision altered. They believed that salvation was imparted by this act. In accordance with Genesis 17:9 to 14, their security was in the ceremony.

One rabbi has said that no circumcised man will see hell. That's Rabbi Manachem(?) in his commentary on The Book of Moses. In the Jalkute(?) Ruebem(?) it is taught, "Circumcision saves from hell." In the Midrash it is said, "God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell." In the book Akadath(?) Jezbac(?), it says, "Abraham sets before the gate of hell and does not allow any circumcised Israelite to enter there."

So, it's pretty clear, isn't it? In the Jewish mind, circumcision was salvation. That rite and that act was all that was required to keep you from hell. In Acts 15:1, some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." That's the other side of it. If you're not circumcised, you can't be saved. If you are circumcised, you can't be lost.

In the Jewish mind then, circumcised was the first meritorious act of obedience to the Law which saved a man by works. The Apostle Paul lived in that world, didn't he? Philippians chapter 3, as he celebrates the things upon which he had set his hope of heaven, you remember what he said. He said this, "Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh, if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more, circumcised the eighth day."

And so, they believed, the Jews did, Paul being one of them before his conversion, that circumcision was a ritual that gained salvation. Paul warns against that belief. If you look for a moment at Galatians chapter 5, and this has implications for us that we'll get to in a moment. Paul says in Galatians 5:2, "Behold, I, Paul," kind of laying it on thick there, "say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you."

What was going on here? Galatia was a Gentile region. There were a number of churches in that region. Paul had established the gospel there and some Judaizers came. And the Judaizers said, "Believing the gospel of Christ is not enough to get into heaven. Holding tightly to the traditional view of circumcision, they said, that's not enough, you need to be circumcised or you will not make it to heaven." Paul says, "If you receive circumcision on that basis, then you will find Christ is of no effect to you because you have now mingled salvation by grace with salvation by works, or circumcision."

And, if you're going to go the way of works, verse 3 he says, "I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, now you're under obligation to keep the whole Law." If you're going to go by Law, you have to keep the whole Law. Borrowing from the third chapter, he said, "If you break one of the Laws, you've broken it all."

On the other hand, he says in verse 4, "You've been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law. You have fallen from the principle of salvation by grace."

But this was a popular thing, for it called the Judaizers to proclaim...Okay, you can believe in Christ, you can believe that Christ is the Messiah. That's not enough. You need circumcision.

Over in chapter 6 of Galatians in verse 12, he said, "There are those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh, trying to compel you to be circumcised." This was their agenda, to compel these believers to be circumcised. Paul says, if you go that route, then your faith was not real faith. You did not affirm a salvation by grace and grace alone, you have fallen from the grace principle, you have

severed yourself from a true relationship to Christ.

Paul gets very direct in this passage as well and he affirms that this kind of compelling is completely outside the bounds of what God allows. Look down in chapter 5 and verse 12. This is one of the strongest statements Paul ever made. "I wish that those who were troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

What in the world does that mean? Galatia was near Phrygia and a great occupation of those people was the worship of Cybele, C-y-b-e-l-e. It was the practice of the priests and devout worshippers of Cybele to show their devotion by castration. Cybelian priests were eunuchs. So Paul says, "If you're going to preach salvation by circumcision, you might as well preach salvation by castration. It's just as pagan, it's no different."

So the matter of circumcision played a very, very important role in the preaching of the gospel to the Jews and to the Gentiles because Judaizers were coming behind Paul and pressing this issue. And, of course, Paul...in dealing with Abraham...deals with this issue at a very important point because in using Abraham, he strikes a blow at their sacramentalism, you could call it, their ritualistic salvation, at precisely the point where they tried to establish it with Abraham. This also strikes a blow at all kinds of ceremonial approaches to salvation.

When Abraham was circumcised, and he was, God Himself was involved in that. It was his circumcision and anticipatory fulfillment of the Law, the Jews said, which qualified him to be the father of many nations. That's in their literature. God involved in the circumcision of Abraham and it was his circumcision and anticipatory fulfillment of the Law which was not yet written that qualified him to be the father of many nations. It was through his circumcision, the Jews said, that Isaac was born of a holy seed. This was their current doctrine. So they had endeavored to say that Abraham was circumcised and it is true he was, and therefore sets the standard for salvation.

However, Paul is going to undo that doctrine and at the same time he's going to undo all sacramental ceremonial ritual approaches to salvation. He's going to sweep away all religious rites, even the rite of circumcision which was commanded by God and served a function but not the function of salvation. This is a very important subject, folks, to deal with because today there are many, many people who are basing their salvation from eternal hell fire on their infant baptism, on their confirmation, on their adult baptism, or on communion, or some other ceremony.

In Catholicism, the ceremonies are almost endless. The worst example of this is the Roman Catholic Church. Their ceremonies and rites are called Sacraments. Do you know what a Sacrament is? It is by definition, I quote, "A thing perceptible to the senses which on the ground of divine institution possesses the power both of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness." That's a Catholic definition of a Sacrament. It is a thing, that's what they call it, a thing that possesses the power to sanctify and make righteous. It is a thing that grants righteousness.

Listen to some quotes from Roman Catholic theology. "The Sacraments confer grace immediately without the mediation of faith." Here's another one, "All the Sacraments of the New Testament confer sanctifying grace on the receivers." Here's another one, "Sacramental rites confer regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life."

Here's another one. "For the dispensing of this grace, it is necessary that the minister accomplish the sacramental sign in the proper manner." The thing works if you do it in the right order. Here's another one. "Neither orthodox belief, nor moral worthiness is necessary for the validity of the Sacrament on the part of the recipient." Here's another one. "Baptism confers the grace of justification." Here's another one. "Council of Trent, the section on the decree of original sin, if anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in infant Baptism, the guilt of original sin is forgiven, or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away, let him be damned...anathema." Damnation is pronounced on anyone who denies that grace...salvation grace, forgiveness of sin is not conferred in infant Baptism.

Here's another one. "We descend into the water full of sins and filth and we arise from it bearing fruit as we have in our hearts the fear of God and in our spirit, hope in Jesus." Here's another one. "According to holy writ, Baptism has the power both eradicating sin and affecting inner sanctification." And they're talking about water and not even immersion. They mean H₂O, for they say, quote: "This is reference to the material which is true and natural water."

Here's another one. "Baptism effects the forgiveness of all punishments of sin, both the eternal and the temporal." Here's another one. "Baptism is necessary for all men without exception for salvation."

Well what about Confirmation? What does that do to the baptized person? Confirmation which usually comes along at around 12 or 13 years of age in their ritual system of that, they say, quote: "Confirmation increases sanctifying grace." Here's another one. "A baptized person can achieve eternal salvation, even without Confirmation." What about the Eucharist? What about the Mass? What about that Sacrament? What does that do?

"The chief benefit of the Eucharist is the intrinsic union of the recipient with Christ." Or, "As food for the soul, the Mass preserves and increases the supernatural life of the soul. It purges of venial sins and the temporal punishments due to sin and increases the life of grace." And so it goes. And you can add Sacraments of Holy Orders, the Sacrament of Marriage, Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

So when Paul deals with the issue of circumcision and the inability of any religious rite or ceremony to justify, he sweeps all of this away...all of it. And he reminds us that if you're putting any hope in any of those things, you have made Christ of no effect. You've negated grace and you've brought yourself under salvation by Law and therefore you are bound to keep the whole Law, or perish.

Now with that in mind, we can pick up the story back in Romans 4, the account of Abraham. Go back to verse 7, let's start there. Quoting from David, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." David here speaking of the blessedness of salvation.

The Jew would feel that this blessedness of which David spoke was only for those who were circumcised. And being circumcised was evidence of their obedience to the Law. The rabbis, in fact, of Paul's day believed that Psalm 32 spoke only of them, that is the Jews, and of no one else. In fact, from the Pasheda(?) it says, on the Day of Atonement, God cleanses Israel and atones for its guilt, as it is written for on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. If anyone should say another nation too He cleanses, it is not so, but it is only Israel for so spake the prophet. It is only Israel that He forgives.

When David saw how God forgives the sins of the Israelites, and has mercy upon them, he began to pronounce them blessed and to glorify them in saying, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." So they narrowed it down that that salvation blessedness of which David spoke in Psalm 32 which is quoted here, was only with reference to Israel and because only Israel was circumcised.

So the Jews put so much stock in this circumcision. How is Paul going to deal with this? Let's go down to verse 9 and find out.

Is this blessing that David talked about, this salvation, this forgiveness and this imputation of righteousness, is this blessing then on the circumcised or on the uncircumcised also? Is it limited to Israel, as they said? Or does it extend to others?

The Jews would say no uncircumcised person could claim an share of God's covenant. Is that true? Were they correct?

Well his approach is masterful. Verse 9 again, "Is this blessing then on the circumcised or on the uncircumcised? For we say...and he quotes Genesis 15:6...faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." We all agree on that. And here's how the Jews viewed that. That Abraham was declared righteous because he was circumcised. In other words, he earned it by his circumcision.

So Paul asks the question in verse 10, "How then was it credited? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Answer: Not while circumcised but while uncircumcised. Was Abraham declared righteous by God after he was circumcised? Or before he was circumcised?

Well the answer is, before he was circumcised. A little chronology here. Abraham was 99 years of age when he was circumcised....99, Genesis 17:24. On that same day, Ishmael, his illegitimate son, was circumcised. He was 13 years of age. When God made the covenant with Abraham, it was in Genesis 15 verse 6 that God said, "His faith was counted to him as righteousness." Between the moment when his faith was counted as righteousness and the time of his circumcision, it was probably at least 14 years. So the blessing of forgiveness and the granting of righteousness was given to Abraham, listen to this, who was an uncircumcised Gentile when he received it. There were yet no Jews. He was an uncircumcised Gentile from a people of idolaters. Circumcision had nothing to do with his righteousness...nothing to do with it at all. In fact, how interesting, Abraham was inside the covenant, he was even given the covenant and he was uncircumcised. Ishmael was circumcised and was permanently outside the covenant, no rite, no religious ceremony confers any righteousness on anyone ever. It didn't on Abraham, it doesn't on anyone else.

Salvation comes by faith to which God responds by crediting righteousness to the account of the one who believed. You cannot emphasize strongly enough, folks, how vital this is to sweep away all forms of ritual salvation. Whether it's infant Baptism by which some people say one is saved, there's a prominent quote/unquote evangelical in the broadest sense of the word, who recently was asked the question, "Who are the true Christians?" To which he answered, "All the people who have been officially baptized." That is a Roman Catholic view, that is a Judaizing view, that is a Jewish view of ritual salvation, cancels grace, makes Christ of none effect.

Well that does pose a question in verse 11. "He received the sign of circumcision." Why? Why?

Well first of all, please notice, it is a sign...it is a sign, symbol. It points to something else. You know what a sign does? Points to something else. If you're looking for Los Angeles and you see a sign, you don't climb up on the sign and say, "I'm there." The sign indicates the direction you should go to get there. The sign is a symbol, it points to something else. It points to another reality. Circumcision was a sign, it pointed to something else. We could say it was a sign of God's physical people, Israel. And there was a certain reason for that physical operation. In Jewish history, through the centuries, according to medical reports, the lowest rate of cervical cancer among women existed among the Jewish people because of circumcision. They were less likely to be infected than other women. And it was a way in which God could preserve His people. And He did. It was therefore a mark of their identity. It was a sign of God's care and protection for them.

But it was a sign of something else more important even than that, it was a spiritual sign. It was a spiritual sign of the fact that they infected each other with sin and they needed a cleansing on the spiritual level. It was a sign of being Jewish and the preservation of the people, but it was a sign of being a sinner. And God chose the procreative organ for that sign because that's where sin was passed from person to person, generation to generation to generation. That's why there's so many times when the prophets say, "Circumcise your hearts. Circumcise your hearts." Deuteronomy 30 verse 6, Jeremiah 4 verse 4, Jeremiah 9 verses 24 to 26, Psalm 51 verse 6. It was a sign that they needed a deeper cleansing, a spiritual cleansing.

In this sense it's like Baptism. Does Baptism save? No. It's a sign. It's a sign that points to the sinner's need to be identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection by faith. The Lord's Table is a sign. Does the Lord's Table save you? Does taking the bread and the cup save you? No. But does it point to the cross where the Savior died to provide salvation? Yes. It's a sign that points to Calvary. Baptism is a sign that points to the need for death, burial, resurrection, union with Christ by faith. And circumcision was a sign. It was a sign of a physical people that were being preserved by God, but it was a sign of the fact that every person is a sinner, passing that sin on generation after generation after generation, and we need a deep soul circumcision, a heart circumcision. Circumcise your hearts.

When we come to Baptism, we demonstrate the Lord's resurrection. When we come to communion, we demonstrate the Lord's death till He comes. When we look at circumcision, it was a demonstration of the need for a deep heart surgery.

It was not just a sign, however. Please notice, it's a seal. Verse 11, "He received a sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised."

What does this mean?

Well for Abraham in his case, God had him circumcised, this is where circumcision began, to authenticate his faith. In Abraham's case, God was saying his faith was real, he has received salvation, he has been forgiven, righteousness has been imputed to him and I mark him to authenticate it. As a sign, it was a necessary picture pointing to the desperate need of every sinner to have heart surgery. As a seal, it was evidence that God had provided for him forgiveness and salvation. It was a sign to all, it was a seal to Abraham that his faith was real and that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcision that righteousness might be credited to them.

Righteousness can be credited to anybody who believes, right? It was credited to Abraham at least 14 years, some say 29 years, a few other numbers offered. But righteousness was credited to him before he was circumcised, apart from any ritual of any kind and it came to him nonetheless from God so that in the future it could be a sign to point to the need of circumcision of the heart. But in his case, in particular, it was a seal, it was evidence. God marked him as a man who had been granted righteousness. We have a kind of circumcision in the sense that it is a seal. Philippians 3:3, "We are the circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God." What's our seal? Ephesians 1, "We are sealed by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is given to us as the guarantee of our inheritance, Ephesians 1:14. The Passover, later on, became a ritual. Passover didn't save anybody but it signified that God had the power to save. It signified that God would save. Those who obeyed Him, that He would save through the blood of a lamb. Circumcision did not save but it signified that God would save. He would circumcise the heart and grant righteousness as He did with Abraham. The Lord's Table doesn't save but it declares that God will save by His work on the cross, all who repent and believe. Baptism does not save, but it declares that He will save the one who puts his trust in Christ and therefore joins into Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

It is faith then, not ritual, that saves. It is faith, not ritual, that makes people right with God. And it started with Abraham in the sense that he's the father. Verse 11, at the end, "Of all who believe without being circumcised that righteousness might be credited to them." He's the father of all believers. What does that mean? Father in what sense?

Just commonness of essence, commonness of nature, commonness of disposition, commonness of character in this sense. He came by faith and we all come by faith. So we share the faith of Abraham, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. That's neither here nor there. But faith is everything and Abraham is the model of salvation by faith apart from any ritual.

So verse 12 sums it up. He is the father of circumcision, to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father, Abraham, which he had while uncircumcised. How about that? An uncircumcised Gentile is the father of circumcised Jewish believers spiritually. They find their connection to him because of a common faith.

There are no rituals that save, only faith...only grace.

Father, we thank You for the time to just look a little more deeply into this wonderful truth. We just thank You so much that You have established a way to be right with You that doesn't depend on us, or none of us would ever make it...none of us. Or as we heard earlier in the waters of Baptism, in the testimony of one of the young people, our righteousness is filthy rags. We thank You that You justify the ungodly, that You save by faith alone, not by works, but by through Your sovereign grace. We bless You for the gift of salvation that You save those who have gone through rituals and those who have not. But You do not save people who trust in those rituals for they are severed from Christ, they have fallen from grace and bound themselves by coming that way to keep the whole Law and thus if they've ever broken it, they're under a curse. And so we set that aside and we come by grace through faith to receive the gift of righteousness given to those who admit they can't earn it and in humble faith, repentant faith ask for it as a gift. And no sinner has ever come and been turned down. You have told us You will not turn us away. Whoever calls upon You will be heard. Thank You, Lord, for this wonderful salvation. May we be faithful in proclaiming it, living lives of gratitude for it we pray

in Christ's name. Amen.

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