

# Foreskins and T-shirts

Gen. 17:1-14, Deut. 30:1-14

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/foreskins-and-t-shirts/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

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## Prayer

And so, Lord Jesus, we thank you that on a tree in the middle of a garden, you became the helper made fit for us; and that that tree stands at the edge of time and eternity; and that you do abide with us, closer than we can even begin to conceive. And yet, Lord God, we don't abide with you. And so, Lord God, we pray that you would judge us with your Word; that you would help us to preach, so we would abide with you and with each other. In Jesus's name. Amen.

## Message

Video clip: *Saturday Night Live, Season 3 Episode 1: "Royale Deluxe II"*  
NBC Productions (1977)

*Clip begins showing Rabbi in the backseat of a car with infant on his lap.*

Spokesman (Dan Aykroyd)      Introducing the 1978 Royal Deluxe II. A luxury name and a luxury ride at a middle-range price? *Impossible?* We've come to Temple Beth Shalom in Little Neck, New York, and asked Rabbi Mayer Taklas to circumcise 8-day-old Benjamin Kanter while riding in the back seat of the elegant Royal Deluxe II.

Spokesman continues      Performing circumcision is demanding. It requires a sure hand and a steady cutting surface. [ the car takes off ] To show you that *our* ride is the finest, sweetest in the world, we've deliberately picked this road because of its rough, uneven surface. *This* was an actual demonstration. Speed: 40 MPH.

The stylish Royal Deluxe II rides smooth because *we* built it right! [ the car drives over potholes ] Unique hydrodine suspension system, rack and pinion steering to ensure outstanding durability and control. And every new stylish Royal Deluxe II offers, as standard equipment, power front disc brakes.

*A toy ball bounces into the street, as the car brakes sharply and we hear the baby cry after the Rabbi makes his final snip.*

Rabbi      Poifect!

Spokesman	You may never have to perform a circumcision in the Royal Deluxe II, but if you do, we're sure you'll agree with Rabbi Taklas...
Rabbi	That's a beautiful baby...and a beautiful car!
Announcer	Royal Deluxe II. A beautiful car.

Remember that commercial?<sup>i</sup>

Ford used to advertise the suspension in the Mercury Marquis by having a jeweler cut a diamond in the backseat of a moving car. He'd make the precision cut on this amazing treasure and declare "Perfect." So, Saturday Night Live remade it with a Rabbi and a baby... "Perfect."

My sister is a nurse and worked in the labor and delivery wing of the hospital doing circumcisions. The pay wasn't very good, but she got a lot of tips. [band drums a rim shot]

But seriously, do you know why you should never settle for a discount circumcision? It's usually a rip-off. [rim shot]

Hey... Do you know how to circumcise a whale? Four Skin Divers...[rim shot]

And now how many of you are slightly uncomfortable? If you are, that's good—This is like a *Lectio-Divina* (which you can learn about in Chris's Wednesday night class.) In *Lectio-Divina* you imagine yourself in the biblical story that you happen to be reading, and this morning you can imagine yourself as Abraham (or Sarah, Abraham's bride, if Abraham is too much of a stretch).

In Genesis 12, God just starts talking to this childless old man living in Iraq named Abram. He tells him he will make a great nation of him, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed... *and then, nothing really happens.*

Years later in Genesis 15, Abram says, "Uh, God, ...I'm old and I still don't have a son."

God says, "Number the stars," and then, "...so shall your offspring be."<sup>ii</sup> He has Abram cut a bunch of animals in two, and then when night falls, the Lord "cuts a covenant." That's the technical term. Abram watches fire and smoke pass between the pieces, as God promises this utterly astounding and unconditional blessing...*and nothing really happens.*

At 86, Abram still doesn't have a baby. Desperate, his wife, Sarai, tries to make it happen by basically pimping her slave girl to her old man Abram. They try to make the promise happen... and Ishmael happens. Ishmael is a blessing, but not the Promised Blessing. *The Promised Blessing just doesn't happen.* And then thirteen years later, when Abram is 99, God appears and reminds Abram of the covenant—that he will make him exceedingly fruitful and that he will now be called Abraham: "father of many nations."

[Image: screen shows the Scripture passage of Genesis 17:7,9-13]

Then, God says:

**"And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring** [zera: seed (singular)] **after you throughout their generations for an everlasting** [*Olam*: "eternal"] **covenant, to be God to you and to your** [seed] **after you...**

**<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your [seed] after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant... [For all you theologians, this is 430 years before Moses and the Covenant of Law, and this covenant isn’t temporal it’s eternal]**

God says: **<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant...** [So, what he’s about to describe isn’t just the terms of the covenant, but its substance. As we’ll see, it’s also a sign. It’s a Sacrament]

God says:

**<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring [zera: seed (singular)] after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your [seed], <sup>13</sup> both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting [Olam: “eternal”] covenant.**

And Abraham did speak unto the Lord saying, “Yeah, Lord, your Word is good, but couldn’t we just wear t-shirts?”

“Couldn’t we start a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, wherein all decisions will be ratified by a two-thirds majority vote at the monthly meeting of the board of directors? And membership is determined by public profession to a statement of faith. And the sign of your membership is a certificate, or maybe even a uniform, or... a bumper sticker? How about double-knit, polyester, big hair and Bible covers?

You say you want a sign, God? ...That’s a weird place for a sign; who’s gonna be reading this sign? How about a bumper sticker or an edgy tattoo on my arm?

But please, God— not this. Please don’t touch me there. That’s private. The constitution says that I have a right to privacy. *Please don’t touch me there; you’re making me uncomfortable.*

Now remember what “there,” that place, is for Old Abraham. (Someone said that the quickest way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.) But that’s not really true, is it? There’s another place especially painful for old Abraham. He’s spent 25 years traveling from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan, to Egypt, and back to Canaan... yearning and hoping, trying and failing—failing at producing the promised blessing, the promised seed, the fruit of the womb, an only begotten son who will bless all the nations of the world.

So, what is that place on Abraham’s body? Isn’t it the place of Abraham’s deepest and most desperate Hope? And the place where Abraham has felt the most failure? And experienced the most disappointment... even in God? That place is shame.

And what is that place for Sarah? Well, it’s her shame, too, isn’t it?

God says, “Uncover that place. You’ll notice some skin covering that most sensitive of all spots on your body. Take a knife and cut that skin off of the end of your 99-year-old ...member. Cut the skin

off of your “Johnson,” and then do it for all the males in your household and for every male baby on the eighth day after he’s born.”

The Bible never talks about female circumcision—the idea there, from what I’ve read, is decreased sensitivity and pleasure. But that’s definitely not the biblical idea behind male circumcision. Hopefully, you remember that the eighth day symbolizes an endless Seventh Day, the Lord’s Sabbath—the Kingdom of Heaven. This is somehow heavenly...

Well soon after, Abraham heals, at least a bit. The Lord appears again and says to Abraham, “Next year, Sarah shall have a son.”

Sarah overhears the conversation and laughs to herself, saying, “After I’m old and worn out, and Abraham is old and worn out, shall I again have pleasure?”

She laughs, and God says, “You laughed.”

Afraid, she says, “I didn’t laugh.”

God says, “No... you did laugh.”

And God gets the last laugh, because Abraham and Sarah do have pleasure. And Sarah gives birth, and they name the child “Laughter” or “He laughs,” in Hebrew *itschaq*; in English, we say “Isaac.”

And here’s the fascinating thing to me: the promised seed, the promised blessing, new life, laughter, and pleasure did not come through a process of addition—that is, Abraham doing more, trying harder, or praying longer. It didn’t come through a process of addition but a process of subtraction... the subtraction of some skin, some flesh, from that most sensitive, vulnerable, and tender spot on old Abraham’s old body.

Shame, pain,... then pleasure and laughter.

And this is, perhaps, what’s most painfully hilarious about the whole incident...and in my experience as well. God never seems to explain *why*; at least not for about 500 years.

If you think the Bible is boring, just read Exodus 4:24-26, (about 430 years later). Moses has just been called by God to go back to Egypt and liberate the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the nation of Israel. (God calls them his “firstborn son”.) And you’ll remember that Moses was rather half-hearted about this task. He had already hoped, tried, and failed forty years before.

Well, in Exodus 4:24, at a lodging place on the way to Egypt, God apparently tries to kill Moses, until Zipporah, his wife, grabs a flint knife and circumcises their firstborn son and touches the bloody foreskin to Moses’s feet—which is probably a euphemism for genitals...(Sounds like a euphemism that guys would invent, huh? “*Oh yeah, that— it’s about, you know— a foot... call it a foot.*”)

Well, when she touches the foreskin to Moses’s foot, God relents and passes over Moses<sup>iii</sup> at the blood of the firstborn. And Zipporah says, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.”

Well, scholars disagree over what exactly happened and what it all means... And that’s because once again, God doesn’t appear to explain.<sup>iv</sup>

And yet forty years later, at the end of his life, speaking prophetically, as the children of Israel are about to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land, Moses begins to explain... at least a bit.

Deuteronomy 30 · Through Moses, God basically tells the Israelites that they will cross into the Promised Land, fail at keeping the Covenant of Law, and be scattered to the nations—basically they’ll hope, and fail, and then the Lord will save them.

Then verse 6:

**And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart [singular—one heart<sup>v</sup>] and the heart of your offspring [Zera: seed (singular)]...**

[In Galatians, Paul makes it clear that it means “seed” as in “one” and not as in “many.”<sup>vi</sup> And he even tells us the name of the seed.]

**<sup>6</sup> And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your [seed]....**

**Why? So that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.** To be uncircumcised then, is to be trapped by death...

We’re to be circumcised; something is to be cut away, exposing something else, so that we can love, which is the fulfillment of the entire commandment—the law. Something is cut away so that something is exposed which allows us to love; and when we love, we live.

So, just as the promised blessing isn’t born through a process of addition but subtraction, so the obedience of Love, which is *Life*, does not happen through a process of addition, so much as a process of subtraction—the circumcision of the heart.

In the 14th century, Meister Eckhart preached, “God is not found, or attained, through a process of addition to anything in the soul, but by a process of subtraction.”<sup>vii</sup> That is, God is found through the circumcision of the heart.

Romans 2:29 · Paul writes, “Yep... ‘circumcision is a matter of the heart.’”

1 Corinthians 7:19, he explains that the point of circumcision isn’t removing physical skin, but the kind of flesh that prevents us from keeping the Commandments of God... which are all Love, in some form.

In circumcision, flesh is cut away from the heart, and something inside the heart is exposed, something that just loves Love that trusts and hopes in Love, which is, in fact, Life.

So Moses says, “... the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your [seed], so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live...

**<sup>11</sup> “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it... the Word.**

Moses reveals that the commandment is a Word that's in their heart. Just think: this Word is already in the heart of the Israelites in the wilderness, although it will not be exposed for another 1500 years. Like a seed that will not germinate until the end of the age.

[Image: Scripture passage on screen showing Romans 10:6-8]

In Romans 10, Paul quotes Moses but changes some of the words. He writes: "Righteousness... says, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (That is, to bring Christ down.) <sup>7</sup> "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead.) <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (That is, the word of faith that we proclaim.)"

In just those few short verses, Paul quotes Moses, changes some of the words, and explains the meaning of circumcision. He writes, "Who will ascend into heaven to bring Christ down (*That's Christmas; not what we do but God does*) or who will descend into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead (*That's Easter, not something we do, but God does.*)" And then he writes, "the Word is in you."

Paul equates obedience to the Commandment, with the Word, with Christ, who is the promised seed of Abraham. And then, he even equates all of that with Faith, saying, "the Word of Faith that we proclaim."

You see, maybe the human heart is like a seed... [seeds] or like treasure in an earthen vessel.

Every seed has a husk, just like you yourself have an earthen vessel. But as long as the husk remains intact, the seed cannot grow. But when the vessel cracks, when the casing splits, when the seed appears to die, it actually is just beginning to live.



Perhaps "faith, hope, and love" is what the Word of God does, like the Life hidden in the seed... the "little spark in a shell of selfhood," as Meister Eckhart would say. <sup>viii</sup> Perhaps, faith, hope, and love is what the Word of God does, and perhaps our own sense of control is like the husk; so, what we think we do encases what God does, like the husk encases a grain of wheat. The biblical word for that husk is "chaff."

And until God threshes the wheat which cracks the chaff, all that proceeds from the heart of man is nothing but evil. But when God separates the chaff from the kernel of wheat, the seed begins to grow, and that life begins to flow. It feels entirely unsafe, for it's the birth of faith, which is surrender to Love. It is hope in Life, even though you feel like you're dying.

It's not seizing control but surrendering control and letting the life flow from your heart, like water from a fountain, like blood in a body. Learning to love is the circumcision of your heart.

And it is Love that binds all things together.

And why am I saying all of this? Because "Christians" no longer seem to believe any of this, and so we do not submit to the circumcision of our hearts.

We say, *"No, God, you can't touch me there... I don't understand; I don't feel safe; I don't want faith, I want a map... I want to predict, I want complete control."* And so, we don't love Love, and we don't live Life, and we each remain trapped and alone.

But check this out—the Word is trapped with us, as if buried together with us in a tomb, like treasure in an earthen vessel, like a kernel of life in the husk of a seed.

And now, in case you're not following, let me remind you of last week's sermon. Last week we asked, "What is a person to God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?"

And this was our answer:

[Image: slide depicting the following words.]

To God the Father, a person is eternal Treasure.

We talked about Ecclesiastes 3. "Whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it... That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is..."

So, if you are something that God does, you are eternal and indestructible... But the you that you think you do—your ego—is a temporal illusion.

[Image: Slide showing the following words:]

To God the Father... you are eternal treasure.

To God the Son... you are Himself... His bride and body.

So, along with St. Paul, you will one day say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [literally "the faith of the Son of God"], who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>ix</sup>

St. Augustine wrote: If there is faith in us, Christ is in us. For what else says the apostle: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" [Eph 3:17]. Therefore, faith in Christ is Christ himself in heart.

In Colossians, Paul writes that the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made known to the saints is "Christ in you, the Hope of Glory."<sup>x</sup> So, Hope in you is Christ in you. Paul even seems to say that hope within the Gentiles is Christ within the Gentiles, even though they don't yet know it's him.

And if God is Love, any real love is God, so love in anyone is God at work in anyone... as if Jesus is the light that enlightens all men, and not just from the outside but from within.<sup>xi</sup> Faith, Hope, and Love in you is the Eternal Light of God in you, the Word of God in you, the Promised Seed in you; it's Christ in you.

It's the eternal treasure that a good Father sees in his son.  
It's the eternal treasure that a good Bridegroom cherishes in his bride.

Last time, I told you of the day that my three-year old son looked up at me with those big trusting eyes in the toy aisle at Walmart, having just pooped in his Superman underwear after I had just asked him for the tenth time—"Don't you need to go potty?" I said, "*Jon... you pooped your pants.*"

And he looked up at me, with those big beautiful eyes and said, "*But you're still proud of me... Right, Daddy?*" And I was... I would've died for him and his faith in me, right there on the spot.

Understand? Jon's Faith in me, Hope in me, and Love for me is eternal treasure; it's my love implanted in my son and returning to me as Faith—it's the best thing I can do, impart faith through love.

But the poopy underwear is what Jon did do—his "do-do"—and what we all do, *but* what was disposed of long ago in the Walmart bathroom... it's temporal, not eternal.

The Faith, Hope, and Love is the treasure in the field, the baby in the stinky manger, the thing that rises from the tomb. And it's shame that keeps it hidden. It was Faith, Hope, and Love that caused Jon to confess it to me.

Faith, Hope, and Love are what a Father treasures in his children.  
Faith, Hope and Love are what the bridegroom treasures in his bride.

And yet, it's also the reason that the bride covers herself in shame. And you know why: Hope makes her vulnerable. She covers the most sensitive, intimate, and vulnerable part of herself—the manifestation of her hope, which is a longing for love—she covers her deepest desire for fear that it will be violated, as it most likely has in the past... for we live in a fallen world.

To the philosophers in Athens in Acts 17:26-27, St. Paul says, "[God] made from one [man] every nation of men... that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him."

In other words, God breathed his Spirit into dust, (that's how he made man), in order that His Spirit in dust would long to return to him. You were made to seek God and find Him.

In other words, the Faith, Hope, and Love in you longs for the Love that is your Maker—the Love which hopes for you and believes in you.<sup>xii</sup> *But now*, you cover your Faith, Hope, and Love in shame, for you've placed your Faith, Hope, and Love in lies, spoken by the father of lies, and thereby have been violated.

So, what does the good bridegroom do, when the woman he loves has closed herself off to him? Doesn't he speak his spirit into her heart in the hope that she would surrender her spirit to his spirit; that they would begin to hope in a communion of love, which is life? That's called Romance.

John 12:32 · “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw—romance—all people to myself,” said Jesus.

So: This Spirit—this Breath of Faith, Hope, and Love—exists deep within the temple of every human heart... like a kernel of life in the casing of a seed. And when the Gospel is preached, “deep calls to deep,” (in the words of Psalm 42). “Deep calls to deep,” the Word preached calls to the Word hidden in the depths of the soul, and the curtain in the temple rips, and the Spirit fills the temple that is yourself—it fills it from the inside out.

The living water fills your empty self with God’s self, uniting you with your Creator, and ultimately all creation, such that you will never ever be alone again, and yet you will know what loneliness is—it’s evil. You will gain “the knowledge of evil” and always choose the Good in freedom—you will love Love, and love is Life, your Bridegroom...

So anyway...

[Image: Slide depicting the following:]

- To God the Father... a person is eternal treasure
- To God the Son... a person is himself—his bride and body
- To God the Spirit... a person is his own body wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, himself rising from billions of tombs and coming together in ecstatic joy.

See? I think that’s what Joy is:

It’s the divine in me, recognizing the divine in another.  
It’s losing yourself and finding yourself, swept away in a river of love.  
Joy is the Dance of Love that is life; it’s eternal Life.

And so why are some folks so dead, so frightened, so anxious, so addicted, so depressed, and so lonely? *They haven’t been circumcised.*

And why am I so anxious, addicted, depressed and lonely?<sup>xiii</sup> *Well, maybe because I still don’t want God to touch me there...I’m not entirely willing to be that vulnerable... I think, “God, couldn’t we just wear t-shirts...?”*

If on our honeymoon night, having waited for five and a half years for this moment of ecstatic communion consummating our covenant of Grace—If Susan would’ve said, “*Hey, I’m tired, but check it out, I bought us matching t-shirts... Hey Peter, instead of that, let’s just wear t-shirts,*”— ...I would’ve died... And maybe Jesus did die...<sup>xiv</sup> in the hope that we’d surrender to him, the Word of Love.

A few years ago, my friend Andrew sent me a link to watch, a TED Talk given by the professor and researcher, Brenee Brown.

[Image: photo of Brenee Brown on screen.]

Her TED Talk<sup>xv</sup> has now had over fifty million views; it’s titled “*The Power of Vulnerability.*”

Several years ago, she began studying people that felt connected, for as she says, “*It’s why we’re here. It’s what makes life worth living—connection.*” Early on, she realized that the thing that

unraveled connection was shame. And then she learned that shame was this strong desire to *not* be seen. And that this was based on the idea that there is nothing worth seeing.

But she found that those that really lived their lives, that connected, shared something in common. She called it “courage”—from the Latin word “*cor*,” meaning heart—so the original definition of courage was to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart. It’s the courage to be “*authentic*.” She said that these people were willing to let go of who they *thought they should be*, in order to be who they *actually were*. And this, she said, is essential for connection—to *fully embrace vulnerability*.

This revelation actually led to her own personal breakdown, for as she puts it: “Scientific research is all about controlling and predicting,” and her “research” led her to this surprising truth—that vulnerability is all about surrendering control and your ability to predict. So, she had a “breakdown,” or as she now refers to it... “a spiritual awakening.”

Vulnerability can feel shameful and thoroughly unsafe, but as she says, “It’s the birthplace of joy, creativity, (this is where actual living babies come from, in case you had forgotten)... Vulnerability is the birthplace of joy, creativity, belonging and love.”

Well everything she said in that talk is basically what the Bible calls “*circumcision*,” or perhaps we could just call it “*the Judgment of God*... living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit...”

If you think about it, *who you should be*—who you’re trying to be, who you long to be—cannot be *who you are*, for if it were *who you are*, you wouldn’t try to be who it is that you, in fact, are not.

Who you “*should be*,” is “*who you are not*,” by definition. And yet, *who you think you should be*, is the image of you that you present to God and others. Which means that others cannot connect to the true you, for you are hiding the *true you* in the *false you*, that you think protects *you*, but is in fact, a prison.

And this is not only true of you; it’s true of all those around you. So, we’re a world of actors interacting with other actors and wondering why we feel so alone... and Religion can even make it worse.

For we gain knowledge of Love in order to act like we do Love, and then find ourselves unable to love, and wondering if there is such a thing as love...

And here’s the ultimate irony: You and I are the very Breath of Love. To be more specific: You and I are the Word of Love in vessels of clay. Love is not simply a law; Faith, Hope, and Love are our nature, and a treasure more precious than Gold.

So, what’s the problem? Why don’t we love Love and Live? Well, ask Abraham or Moses... We’d rather obey some rules, print some t-shirts, organize a fundraiser, act an act... but *circumcision*? — No way.

Abraham circumcised himself<sup>fxvi</sup>, and it must’ve been a sloppy mess. But how could I circumcise my heart, make the cut, and call it perfect? Well, Moses prophesied that God would circumcise your heart.

And St. Paul reveals just how it happens:

Colossians 2:11 · In [Christ]... you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, [the ego, the old man, the false self], by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith [not “in,” but literally “of”] faith that’s *of*, faith that *is*, the powerful working of God<sup>xvii</sup>, who raised him from the dead.

Who it is that you judge yourself to be dies with Christ, and who it is that God says you are rises with Christ and has always been hidden in him.

To be circumcised is to expose yourself to the Judgment of God in Jesus our Lord. He is the firstborn son of God, and he is our Bridegroom of blood.

To come to the cross is to see that with all your striving to save yourself, you have in fact crucified the Savior—it is to die to your ego. And to come to the cross is to see that the Savior died for you, because you’re worth it. Faith, Hope, and Love in you is the true you and eternal treasure. In fact, Faith, Hope, and Love in you is the Spirit of Jesus rising within you.

- It’s the Spirit that cries, “*Abba Daddy.*”
- The Spirit that looks up with big, beautiful eyes and says, “*But your still proud of me... Right, Daddy?*”
- It’s the Spirit of Jesus that hopes in the Father.
- And it’s the Spirit of Jesus, spoken into the heart of his Bride, that romances her to surrender her hope, rather than cover it in fig leaves, fear, and shame.

You can’t make yourself Love; you must be exposed to the Judgment of Love. And in this way, Love will make you. In this way, Love, like a seed, will grow into who it is that you truly are.

And Love binds everything together. He connects you, the true you, to himself and to your neighbor— not your image of your neighbor, but your actual neighbor. Christian community is not built on human effort and control. It’s built on the surrender of control that is confession.

It happens when we stop judging our neighbor and instead, expose ourselves to the Judgment of God, which is the circumcision of the heart. I’ve seen it hundreds and thousands of times, and yet every time, I think I’m a bit shocked and amazed at its beauty and power.

One of the first times I paid attention was as a new youth pastor, in my tenth-grade boys’ Bible study—talk about a challenging discourse! All silence, gas, burps, and bragging... until one day, Brian—who never had anything interesting to say, and I thought was never listening—Brian said, “*Do you guys ever think about... killing yourself?*” And wow! In that moment, something was born... the body of Christ was born.

Around the campfire, everyone was trying to impress everyone else, including me, which would explain why the talk didn’t really connect. And then, Paul—the life of the party—stood up, and through tears, he told us all how ashamed he was that at the age of 17, he was losing his hair... And in that moment, something was born... the body of Christ was born.

If you have a small group or a life group, I hope it’s not an accountability group; I hope it’s a confessional.<sup>xviii</sup> For in a group like that, something is born... the body of Christ is born.<sup>xix</sup>

The Body of Christ is not who we should be. It's who we are but just don't know we are, for everyone is hiding.<sup>xx</sup>

And so, the offering that we all need most from you... is yourself—stripped of your image of yourself—we need your circumcised heart.

I'm asking you to participate in the Wednesday night Zoom class...

- or participate in one of these "Meet and Greet" that Chris and Frances are organizing...
  - or participate in a life group, small group, or sermon watching group...
  - or simply greet your neighbor...
- ...all with a *circumcised heart*.

We just hired Chris Lindenmeyer to be our Pastor of Community Life. But Chris cannot create "Community Life." Chris can only remind us that we *are* Community Life. It's not who we should be; it's who we are, and come to know that we are, once we expose ourselves to the Judgment of God... and this is *the Judgment of God*:

This is literally how God makes the cut... and calls it "perfect."

## Communion

The Word of God, who is God, took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you." And he took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood." Drink of it all of you.

## Benediction

Behold, "The Word is near you... on your tongue... and in your heart." And yes: It is all a bit terrifying, but it all ends in a communion of endless laughter.<sup>xxi</sup>

"Do you want to know what goes on in the core [the heart] of the Trinity? I will tell you," wrote Meister Eckhart.

In the core of the Trinity the Father laughs  
and gives birth to the Son.  
The Son laughs back at the Father  
and gives birth to the Spirit.  
The whole Trinity laughs  
and gives birth to us.<sup>xxii</sup>

Let's drink to a whole lot of laughter.

Faith in God's Judgment is Courage to be vulnerable.  
And Vulnerability is the Ability to Connect.  
And Connection is Life.  
For we are a Body.

In other words, we love because he first loved us.

So, by way of benediction: Believe the Gospel, and it will circumcise your heart and set you free to love and to live.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> When I was a kid, Ford used to advertise the suspension in the 1972 Mercury Marquis by having a jeweler cut a diamond in the backseat of the car while driving in New York city traffic... he'd make the precision cut on the priceless diamond and declare "perfect."

<sup>ii</sup> It's interesting that this happens in the day, and as I heard one Rabi in Israel teach, there's only one star that you can number in the day and that's the sun. "Offspring" (seed) is singular though star is plural. In Galatians Paul argues that the offspring is one and the one is Jesus, in whom all people are united in one body—the *eschatos* Adam.

<sup>iii</sup> <sup>48</sup> If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. <sup>49</sup> There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." - Exodus 12:48-49

Notice that circumcision is tied to Passover (Easter) and the key for entering the community. At one time we were strangers to the covenant.

<sup>iv</sup> Have you ever noticed this? He makes us hope, and then fail, and even grow thoroughly disappointed in him, and then engineers a crisis... long before he shows up and explains why.

<sup>v</sup> It's interesting that heart is "singular" and usually is singular in most Old Testament passages, but not always. it's like Israel has one heart

<sup>vi</sup> Translators like to point out that it can be understood as plural, but in Galatians 3:16 Paul makes a big deal out of the fact that it's not plural it's singular; not seeds, but seed, and the seed is Christ.

<sup>vii</sup> The great Meister Eckhart said very beautifully, "God is not attained by a process of addition to anything in the soul, but by a process of subtraction."

- Anthony De Mello, *Awareness* (New York, NY: Image Books, Doubleday, 1990), p. 82

The German Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart (c. 1260—c. 1328) preached, "God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction."

- I'm not sure where this version of the quote came from.

<sup>viii</sup> "Still, in spite of their endless differences, if God and man are of the same genus, it must be possible to set free the divine kernel of being in man's inmost self by the ever-increasing conquest of his outer self-identity. This divine kernel, this "little spark" of God which is concealed within the shell of selfhood, is as high above all that is purely human and personal as heaven is high above the earth. It is the germ of eternal life and the seed of God, the point of divine grace from which man may derive his worth and hope"

- Raymond Blakely, explaining the theology of Meister Eckhart and quoted in Meister Eckhart: From Whom God Hid Nothing, pp. xxii-xxiii

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<sup>ix</sup> Galatians 2:20  
<sup>x</sup> Colossians 1:26

<sup>xi</sup> Faith, hope and love in you is the Light of God in you—the Light that enlightens all men.  
 And as any physicist will tell you, a photon doesn't experience the flow of time; it's like... eternal.

<sup>xii</sup> "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." -1 Cor. 13

<sup>xiii</sup> Maybe I haven't been entirely circumcised, or believed my circumcision; maybe I don't have faith in the Judgment of God.

<sup>xiv</sup> Maybe Jesus did die... because his Bride just wanted to wear T-shirts, and Robes, and long phylacteries, and her own righteousness and good deeds.  
 She would not surrender to the revelation of Love.

<sup>xv</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)

<sup>xvi</sup> Jim Gaffigan has a great routine about this, he starts with Abraham and ends with Jesus, which is rather prophetic, whether he knows it or not.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Powerful working" is one word in Greek, *energeias*, in the genitive case denoting source or origin. The faith is not "in" the powerful working of God. The faith is or is the product of the powerful working of God. Modern translations, unlike the King James, often butcher the translation of the genitive case in words that reference faith.

<sup>xviii</sup> There's nothing as beautiful as confession.  
 Confession is the surrender of who you think you should be but aren't.  
 It's faith hope and love in the one that calls you beloved.  
 That faith hope and love is the likeness of God.  
 It's who "I am" buried in the old stone temple that I think is "me."

<sup>xix</sup> According to historian Ernest Kurtz, Alcoholics Anonymous came out of a discovery Bill Wilson made in his first meeting with Doctor Bob Smith. On his own, Bill had stayed sober for six months until he made a trip out of town, where a business deal fell through. Depressed, wandering a hotel lobby, he heard familiar sounds of laughter and ice tinkling in glasses. He headed toward the bar, thinking "I need a drink."

Suddenly a brand new thought came to him, stopping him in his tracks: "No, I don't need a drink-**I need another alcoholic!**" Walking instead toward the lobby telephones, he began the sequence of calls that put him in touch with Dr. Smith, who would become AA's cofounder.

Church is a place where I can say, unashamedly, "I don't need to sin. I need another sinner." - Philip Yancey, *Church: Why Bother?*, p. 52

<sup>xx</sup> A first grader went on her first day to a newly integrated school at the height of the segregation storm. An anxious mother met her at the door to inquire, "How did everything go, honey?"  
 "Oh, Mother! You know what? A little black girl sat next to me!" In fear and trepidation, the mother expected trauma, but tried to ask calmly:  
 "And what happened?"  
 "We were both so scared that we held hands all day."  
 -James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 432

<sup>xxi</sup> This is is the knife that "cuts to the division of soul and spirit."  
 This is the circumcision, that cuts away the flesh and reveals the Spirit, the Spirit that cries abba father and binds everything together.

<sup>xxii</sup> Meister Eckhart, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, trans. and ed. Matthew Fox (Bear and Company: 1983), 129.  
 [posted by Richard Rohr]