

## ***The Baptist Faith and Message:*** **II. God, Part C: God the Holy Spirit**

**The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.**

**The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine.**

In this statement, the *BF&M* completes its orthodox expression of the Trinity by declaring the third Person to be divine. The Holy Spirit's personhood is testified to in Scriptures by the use of masculine pronouns to describe Him. He is male and it could not be otherwise or the Trinity would be broken. Also, He has traits indicative of personhood, such as being grieved, lied to, or striving. He is called Holy Spirit because other spiritual beings exist that are evil. Scientists who become Christians will attempt sometimes to describe God, especially the Holy Spirit, as a universal energy or force. He is not a universal energy, force or the long sought for answer to the unified field theory. (For years, scientists have unsuccessfully attempted to show some connection between gravity and electromagnetism.) Well meaning as these scientists may be, any concept of God that includes God as part of His creation must be immediately rejected. Although it is by Him that all things hold together, He is not the glue. He simply wills it and it is so.

**He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth.**

Section I of the *BF&M* pointed out that the Scriptures were inspired by God. Scripture attributes that work specifically to the Holy Spirit. He enables us to understand the Word. The former is by revelation and the latter is by illumination, by which He brings light to what is already there. When the *BF&M* says "understand truth" it means "understand the Truth," that is, the Scriptures. The difference is significant because truth can be relative, but "the Truth" is absolute. A person can be truthfully wrong. God is always right and He cannot lie. He is called "Faithful and True."

**He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Savior, and effects regeneration.**

Each Person of the Trinity gives glory and honor to the Others. Could it be otherwise? We have not enough time or space to recount all of the ways in which the Holy Spirit brings Christ glory. So, we will focus on the one most important to us. The Holy Spirit brings to pass the salvation of the people for whom Jesus Christ suffered and died. Without the work of the Spirit, all that the Father gave the Son, would not come to Him, that is, come to Christ in repentance and faith. Let us be clear. Election by itself or the atonement alone, does not save a person. Salvation is brought to pass by the Triune God, each Person contributing and Each necessarily working in concert. While there may be some disagreement among Christians about the order in which conviction, calling and regeneration occur, let us all agree that these are the work of the Holy Spirit and not our

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doing. The Spirit says, “I will work and who shall let it.” He does not wait for our permission; He is on an unstoppable mission. He is not willing that any of His should perish.

**At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ.**

According to the *BF&M*, regeneration occurs in a moment or instantaneously. This is the right understanding of regeneration. Regeneration is too often wrongly understood as a long process. The *BF&M* also rightly associates regeneration with Spiritual baptism, which we understand to be the indwelling of a believer by the Holy Spirit. There is more to say on the matter, but it is better to wait until Section IV which discusses the theological terms for the events, both instantaneous and ongoing, that collectively we call salvation.

**He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church.**

Although the *BF&M* did not use the word “sanctification” in this section on the Holy Spirit, the rest of the paragraph describes the process of sanctification by which the Holy Spirit makes believers Christ-like. The Holy Spirit has a very hard job (working on me) so it is a good thing He is omnipotent. It is He that works in us both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. He gives believers Spiritual gifts for the growing and building up of the church. The *BF&M* remains silent as to whether the “sign” (aka, Apostolic or miraculous) gifts are still active or if they have ceased. The sign gifts are prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and administering the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Recently, the International Mission Board (IMB) of the SBC vigorously debated the propriety of missionaries using a “private prayer language,” in which they privately pray in unintelligible speech. Appropriately, the IMB has taken a position against the practice, but the *BF&M* was not helpful in justifying the IMB’s position because the *BF&M* is not explicitly cessationist (i.e., does not state that the sign gifts have ceased). Actually, the number of SBC churches that permit or encourage speaking in tongues is on the rise. Like many Baptists, I believe that the sign gifts ended with the Apostles and completion of the New Testament Scriptures. Even back then, the “tongues” spoken by the early church were understandable languages, and not the babble that so many of our charismatic brothers and sisters practice now. Unfortunately, “tongues”, as practiced now, is a conduit for spiritual mischief.

**He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ.**

Baptists believe that a person’s salvation cannot be lost because “He (the Holy Spirit) that has begun a good work (regeneration) shall perform it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Our being “sealed” is a wonderful analogy. The use of a seal tool was commonplace in NT times and was used to validate contracts (covenants) and business deals. The seal emblem was pressed into a soft material such as a moist clay tablet or heated sealing wax, which would then harden so that the impression became permanent. In the analogy, we are like soft clay, the Holy Spirit is the seal, and the emblem of the seal is Christ. The regenerate heart yields under the seal and is conformed to the image of Christ as the seal is pressed into the believer. Today, legal documents are often notarized, which can require the use

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of the notary seal to demonstrate authenticity. Similarly, the seal of the Spirit is proof that we are authentic Christians.

**He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.**

Worship, evangelism and service are the totality of the Christian life. The Holy Spirit is the prime mover of that life. We can live a Christ-centered life only because the Holy Spirit molds us and moves us. We fail to give Him the recognition that He deserves. When Jesus says, “Lo, I am with you till the end of the age” and “I will never leave you or forsake you,” it is by sending His Spirit, the third Person, to indwell us that He makes good His promise. The strength of the church depends on the strength of its members. The enlightenment and empowerment of the church is not manifest in speaking tongues, being slain in the Spirit, new revelations, or mega-mania. Rather, Holy Spirit power is put on display in repentance from sin, love for God and His Word, and love for the brethren. Holy Spirit power is demonstrated by the fruit of the Spirit in the believer: love, joy, faith, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance. In whom these fruits are always absent, the Holy Spirit is also absent. Praise God, He is present in us!