

The Baptist Faith and Message:

III. Man

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

The chapter on man has been significantly modified from the 1925 *BF&M*. Most of the modification took place in the 1963 revision, but further revision occurred in the *BF&M* 2000. The overall effect of the changes has been to paint fallen man's condition in a better light than it actually is according to the Bible. Rather than being born depraved and under condemnation as taught in Scripture, he is only inclined to sin rather than in bondage to it. In his fallen condition, he remains sacred to God.

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation.

In Scripture we often see God described with human physical characteristics, such as having arms and hands. However, we are also told that God is a spiritual, non-material being. Does this mean that God is a spirit shaped like a human and we have been made in that shape? No, of course not. God speaks of Himself having human physical characteristics such as eyes and ears as an accommodation to our inability to comprehend Him in all His Glory. Our being made in His image pertains to our having personhood. We have an immortal soul and have been endowed with certain of His attributes, for example, rationality. The "gift of gender" statement was added to the *BF&M* 2000 and is a result of the culture in which we live. Because of the advance of homosexuality within the ranks of the church (primarily in other denominations), Southern Baptists felt it necessary to affirm that God established humans as male and female as part of His good purpose in creation. Sadly, it has become necessary to defend gender as a good thing.

In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race.

Although God made man "upright," which is to be understood as holy and righteous, Adam and Eve had the ability to sin and the ability not to sin. Before they sinned, they existed in the state of innocence. Adam, having been given dominion over creation, was the representative of all of his descendents, mankind. Prior to the fall, freedom of choice is rightly emphasized because Adam's decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was the last exercise of free will ever made by mankind. The curse put an end to free will because man's will became a slave to a fallen, corrupt nature. Nevertheless, our choices are still free. God does not violate our conscience or force us to do anything against our will. We just choose wrongly because our will is tied to our fallen nature. Our nature determines our will, which affects our choices.

The Baptist Faith and Message:

III. Man

Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation.

The language of 1963 *BF&M* (which is retained in the 2000 *BF&M*) shifted the SBC position on the effect of the fall on humanity. In the 2000 *BF&M*, fallen humanity, rather than inheriting a corrupted nature producing bondage to sin, instead, has “a nature and an environment inclined toward sin.” There is a big difference between being in bondage to sin and inclined toward it. People do not necessarily act on their inclinations. The addition of “environment” also deflects the blame for sin away from the sinner to the environment. The environment of temptation and sin (the world) exists because it is filled with sinners and is the domain of Satan and his minions. We are given the impression that we are really not so bad, but succumb to our inclinations due to an evil environment. Of greater concern, however, is that the 2000 version does not present an orthodox understanding of original (inherited) sin. The *BF&M* 2000 teaches that condemnation results from moral action. The 1925 version presented the doctrine of original sin correctly.

1925 *BF&M* ...he transgressed the command of God and fell from his original holiness and righteousness; whereby his posterity inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors.

We must understand that when Adam fell, we all fell with him. In Adam, all die. The fall produced spiritual death. Now, we are conceived and born in sin and are declared guilty on the basis of Adam’s guilt. Actual transgressions (sinful thoughts or actions) are not necessary to be condemned or to be declared guilty. They just prove that we are guilty criminals and acting in accordance with our fallen nature. By King David’s statement, “in sin did my mother conceive me,” we learn that even embryos are guilty. But God, being rich in mercy, has, through Jesus Christ, atoned for the original Adamic guilt and the actual sins of the elect. By the Spirit, the new birth restores their pre-fall nature. My personal belief is that ALL persons dying in infancy or *in utero* are elect. The reprobate (i.e., those not chosen for salvation) are described in the Bible as left to harden in their sin. Such hardening would seem to require a conscious existence and actual transgressions (i.e., growing up). Esau was declared by God to be reprobate *in utero* and he grew to manhood and fathered the Edomites, who were frequent enemies of God’s people. However, in matters where the Scripture is not abundantly clear, we cannot be dogmatic. Our ultimate comfort is in knowing that God can only do what is right.

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Added in the 1963 version, the purpose of this statement is to confront racism. As originally created, Adam and Eve were truly “sacred” persons and communed with God. However, personhood ceased to be sacred when sin entered. The only ones who can claim sacredness of human personhood are “the saints” of God, the set apart ones. These are the redeemed from all ages. The unredeemed, although the beneficiaries of God’s manifold common graces, are not sacred in the biblical sense of the term, which carries

The Baptist Faith and Message:

III. Man

with it the idea of holiness. The other reason given for the sacredness of all humanity is that Christ died for man. Since the two are tied together in the statement, the atonement here is meant to extend to all mankind. Regardless of one's view of the atonement, whether universal or limited, the implication is that Christ's atonement was motivated by our sacredness or worthiness. This is backwards. The atonement of Christ was necessary due to sinfulness, not sacredness. He went to the cross for sinners, the Just for the unjust, to justify them and make them holy (sacred). The elect are redeemed and sanctified (i.e., made sacred) not because they are worthy or deserving, but because they RECEIVE GRACE. Certainly, we as Christians should treat everyone with respect and love because they are God's creation and made in His image, albeit now an image marred by sin. But, the great wellspring of Christian love is the unconditional love that we have received and work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to have us fulfill the greatest commandment: That we love one another.