

The Baptist Faith and Message:

IV. Salvation, part 1

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.

B. Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

C. Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

D. Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

The *BF&M* 1963 combined six small chapters of the *BF&M* 1925 into one large chapter that has been preserved almost verbatim in our *BF&M* 2000. Due to the length and importance of this section, it will be necessary to comment on Section IV in two parts.

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man...

A human being is comprised of a material part (the body) and an immaterial part (the soul/spirit). The soul/spirit may exist without the body, but the body cannot continue without the soul/spirit. The *BF&M* is written such that it is acceptable to “dichotomists”, who view the soul and spirit to be interchangeable terms for the immaterial part, and the “trichotomists”, who view the soul and spirit as separate immaterial entities. Regardless of the di/tri debate, the important point is that God redeems a person completely and He preserves the unique relationship of the material and immaterial aspects of a person. Salvation guarantees the eternal union of these parts in a redeemed state of perfection.

...and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer.

“Offered freely” can be understood in two ways. It could be understood as the gospel being preached to all peoples and nations with the meaning of “freely” being “indiscriminately.” The other, more likely meaning, is that salvation is offered freely in that it cannot be earned. Additionally, to say that salvation is offered to all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior bases the offer on the acceptance, which is a non sequitur (i.e., it does not follow). Clearly, an offer must precede an acceptance. Christ is offered to many who reject Him. If Christ has “obtained eternal redemption” for believers, their salvation is more than offered, it is secured. This phrase might be better worded “...and is

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secured by Jesus Christ, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for all who accept Him as Lord and Savior.”

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In the broadest sense, salvation includes election which sets in motion and makes certain regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification of the elect person. Thankfully, election is specifically addressed in Section V. The point in Section IV is that salvation is the sum of its parts and that they are all essential, the visible, experiential part now being sanctification. Different than some other Christian denominations, Southern Baptists require expression of personal faith. Many other denominations permit faith in Christ to be expressed on behalf of infants by their parents or a “spiritual” representative. Because of the Godfather movie series, the term “godfather” has become mainly associated with Mafia dons. However, it originated and continues in the practice of having a personal representative confess faith in Christ on behalf of the infant at the time of Christening. Beyond a personal faith, the object of our faith is the LORD. There are some within the SBC who believe that salvation is by faith in Jesus as Savior and that at some later time or during a second “experience” the believer comes to accept Him as Lord. The *BF&M* makes it clear that a believer’s faith comprehends that Christ is their Lord and that He rules and reigns in their life.

A. Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 3, Jesus explains that a person must be “born again” to enter the kingdom of God. In this rebirth, an unbeliever (of whom dead Lazarus is a picture) is raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Just as physical birth is a singular event, so also is regeneration. Regeneration is the first thing, from the human perspective, that must happen for a person to be saved. It is necessary for faith, repentance and sanctification. Obviously, a person who is spiritually dead to God cannot have true faith and trust in Him. In John 3, Jesus compares the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing rebirth to the wind and its audible effect upon what it blows. He says the wind blows where it may and that you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going, but you hear its sound. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is a sovereign, invisible act of God that has an outward effect. We cannot summon the wind. In the same way God controls the wind, He sends the Spirit to whom He will. Only those whom the Father has chosen will be thus blown upon. Can a person experience the moment of regeneration? I would say no, because it is an instantaneous change of heart worked unconsciously in the person. How then can a person know if they have been regenerated? Regenerate persons become aware of their sin against God and are convicted by it. They see their need for Christ to pay their debt and they cry save me Lord! They trust that He has saved them. They repent of their sin. They are made new creatures. Old things pass way. They become more interested in God than in the world. To use an old term, they are converted.

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Sometimes regeneration is misunderstood as an ongoing process or that it follows faith and repentance. There is a sense in which a lost person whose life is a shambles will be renewed or regenerated when they become a Christian. For example, drunkards and drug addicts recover and put their lives back together. However, the proper term for the ongoing process of renewal, victory over sin, growth in Christ and Kingdom advance is sanctification.