

The Baptist Faith and Message:

IV. Salvation, part 2

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 was necessary to comment on Section IV in two parts. This is the second part.

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.

A misunderstanding of justification leads to misery! Justification is an act of God's grace in which guilty sinners are accounted righteous by having Christ's righteousness applied to them and their guilt applied to Him. This wonderful exchange is called imputation. It is only possible because Christ substitutes for the sinners and receives the punishment for their sin. Sometimes people confuse justification with the continuous process of sanctification. However, justification, like regeneration, is a singular event in the life of the believer. One can safely say "Once justified, always justified." Only true believers are justified and it happens at the moment they repent and believe. At that moment, Christ's atoning work is applied to the believer and they are justified by faith in Him. Some Christians believe that justification is eternal on the basis of God's election of people to salvation before the foundation of the world. If one takes this to an unbiblical extreme, a person can begin to believe that God's election alone is sufficient for salvation and the need for repentance and faith falls by the wayside. You can ultimately end up thinking that the elect will be saved even if they don't repent. Even worse, the urgency to preach the gospel and do missions evaporates. This way of thinking is called hyper-Calvinism, which is not Calvinism at all.

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At the opposite end of the spectrum, others would say that you are not justified by faith alone. They believe that justification is a mixture of Christ's work, their work, and the work of others (e.g., Mary and other dead "Saints"). In saying that justification is by **God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness**, the *BF&M* makes it clear that it is only His righteousness and not our efforts that justifies believers. Those who believe that justification must somehow be earned are chained to servitude trying to make bricks without straw and left wondering how many bricks is enough.

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.

Sanctification is a life-long experience that begins with regeneration. It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit indwelling us and conforming us to the image of Christ. The *BF&M* states that sanctification involves being "set apart to God's purposes." This is the basic definition of sanctification. There are some who say that you can be justified but not sanctified. Some say that sanctification comes at a later time or in a separate experience. Some say that speaking in tongues is essential to sanctification. However, we believe that sanctification occurs by the means ordained by God: the Word, prayer, and Christian fellowship. No special experience or signs are needed nor should any be sought. The *BF&M* makes a needed distinction between moral and spiritual growth. Spiritual growth requires the indwelling of the Spirit and will produce moral growth. Conversely, "moral" improvement does not necessarily indicate the work of the Spirit. A person can be highly moral but remain spiritually dead.

Sanctification is often measured by the absence of "vices." People say to themselves "if I can only stop _____ (you fill in the blank), I will be more spiritual and more sanctified." Obviously, getting vices out of one's life is a good thing. But, absence of vices is not the best measuring stick for sanctification. God measures it by how much fruit of the Spirit one bears. I can promise you that as you desire to be more and more like Jesus, the less interested you will be in any vice that has you in its jaws. The more submissive you are to God's revealed will, the easier your sanctification will be. Are you warm wax or are you iron? Will a light press suffice or must you be struck with a hammer?

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

Glorification is that blessed final state which Paul refers to as "our blessed hope." Currently, there is only one person who has attained glorification and He is the Lord Jesus. The first step in glorification is receiving the resurrection body. Although Enoch was taken up alive and Lazarus was raised from the dead, only Jesus has been resurrected and received his glorified body. He is the first fruits. When believers die and go to be with the Lord, we leave behind our material bodies and exist in a spiritual state with Jesus. At the end of the age when the dead are resurrected and living persons are caught up, all souls from Adam on will be united with an eternal resurrection body suited to their final destination, some for glory and some for eternal punishment. We should be cautious

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when speculating about the nature of the glorified bodies that we will have one day. It is probably safe to say that the body will have a recognizable form so that we will know each other. It may not even be necessary to “meet” people; we will just know them. The body will forever work perfectly, never grow weary, never age, or suffer illness. The body will be eternally PERFECT. However, the best aspect of glorification is God’s removing our ability to sin. We will have no desire to sin even if confronted with temptation (which we won’t be). Our will shall be perfectly conformed to God’s will such that every thought we have, every word we speak, and every choice we make will always be right in His sight. The redeemed of the new heaven and new earth cannot fall!