

The Baptist Faith and Message: **V. God's Purpose of Grace, part 2**

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

The *BF&M* 1963 combined two sections of the *BF&M* 1925 into one section that has been preserved almost verbatim in our *BF&M* 2000. The first section dealt with election and the other section addressed perseverance. As the section heading indicates, election and perseverance are purposed by God and are by His grace. This section will be handled in two parts. This second installment addresses the doctrine of perseverance also known as the doctrine of eternal security.

All true believers endure to the end.

All Baptist confessions of faith affirm that a saved person (a true believer) cannot lose his or her salvation or finally fall away. Many other denominations believe otherwise. It is interesting to note that the denominations who affirm that true believers can never be lost are the denominations who embrace that salvation is based in God's sovereign will. Those denominations which have salvation based in man's will teach that salvation can be lost. This actually makes sense because if your salvation ultimately rests in your will, your salvation and sense of security in Christ will be at the mercy of your will at any one moment. Conversely, if your salvation ultimately rests in God's will, your salvation is CERTAIN if you have come to Christ with a sincerely repentant heart and faith in Him. "He that has begun a good work shall perform it until the day of Christ Jesus." We are saved and endure to the end because His grip is almighty and cannot fail. This view is also consistent with the doctrine of adoption. The Scripture teaches that we are adopted by God and it is always understood as the guardian adopting the child, not vice versa. There is no specific case or a suggestion in Scripture that God ever annuls an adoption.

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The reason that God "accepts" people in Christ is because God places them in Christ. Their acceptability rests in their being regenerated by the Spirit, justified and accounted righteous based in Christ's atoning cross work. Only those who pursue Christ-likeness, albeit not perfectly, and manifest the fruit of the Spirit are truly in Christ. Unfortunately, the Bible describes a class of people who give the appearance of being Christian, but ultimately turn away. Permanently turning away is called apostasy. Galatians 5:4 says, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." This is often used as a "proof text" that Christians can lose their salvation. But, if this text is read in the context of the whole book, this verse is one of

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many verses in which Paul is warning the Galatian church that the gospel is ALL of grace and not by works of the law. Some false teachers (Judaizers) were saying, for example, that physical circumcision was necessary for salvation. So, when Paul says, "ye have fallen from grace," he means that they have drifted from their original understanding of the true gospel which he had taught them.

Much of modern evangelism has been directed at extracting professions of faith from people. Charles G. Finney, a lawyer turned evangelist, launched the revivalist movement in America in the mid 1800s. He did not believe in original sin and, therefore, believed that people have inherent ability to repent and believe. His ministry focused on convincing people to profess faith in Christ. He used what many described as coercive methods to accomplish this. At his "revival" meetings, he would call people to the front pew keeping them there until they professed faith. The method came to be known as the "anxious bench." This was the origin of what we now call "the invitation" or "altar call." In our day, an invitation to come forward and "get saved" at the end of the service has become a Southern Baptist tradition. Some would say that a church service without an altar call is not church service. However, well meaning traditions can sometimes have an undesirable effect. People begin to think backwards and wrongly begin to believe that the visible act causes the inward change. In listening to peoples' salvation experience, there is a tendency for them to talk about when they "went forward" or when they were baptized, rather than talking about conviction of sin and repentance. We so easily associate outward things with spirituality. While I do not advocate the altar call, I strongly believe in an urgent gospel invitation to come to Christ. God will meet you wherever you are because, in the new covenant, the heart has become the altar. God is no more powerful or any more present at the front row than He is at the back row.

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Baptists readily admit that we are sinners saved by grace. Although we have a great advantage in having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are not yet made perfect. Nevertheless, in regeneration, we are given a new nature. Some teach that Christians have two natures (the old and the new) in competition. However, Scripture refers to us a new creation. The old man or old nature is put to death and we are enabled to pursue godliness. Paul ascribes our continuing sin to our corrupt physical body. The war he describes in Romans 7 is not a war of two natures in one body; it is a war of the new spiritual nature against the flesh. The old sin nature has left a deep imprint in our hearts and minds. But, praise God, He is making a new impression of Jesus in us.

I Corinthians 3: 1-4 has been used by some to teach that there is a subset of Christians that are carnal (lit., in the flesh). The "carnal Christian" is saved, but acts like a lost person because of immaturity in the faith. The problem with this teaching is that they can remain "carnal Christians" for their whole life. All Christians act carnally whenever they sin, but this does not mean that they are carnal. When Paul uses the adjective "carnal" to describe a group of people or a type of behavior, he means lost people behaving as lost

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people. True Christianity knows nothing of classes. While there are many gifts; there is one body. Paul's purpose in I Cor 3:1-4 is to ask the Corinthian church to examine themselves. Corinthians! I fear that some of you could be lost! If your actions are carnal and there is no difference between you and the world, maybe you are carnal! Scripture must be misinterpreted to teach that Christians can remain carnal. Jesus Himself told the adulteress, "Go. And sin no more."

For Christians, sin can be pleasurable and self satisfying, but it ALWAYS produces conviction and repentance in them. Could it be otherwise? With the indwelling Spirit ever present and actively working in you, could it be possible to think, speak, look upon, or desire unholy things without conviction? A sure sign of self-deception is sinning with impunity and no desire to stop. Christians will not remain in sin because they will be too miserable to enjoy it. Paul puts it this way: "Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? God Forbid!"

In our age of easy believism, it would have been better if the last paragraph of the *BF&M* section V had read **...temporal judgments on themselves; yet, they shall be granted repentance, and they shall be kept.....**