

Salvation

Part 1

Article IV

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, 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 Saviour.

Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:11-14,29; 3:3-21,36; 5:24; 10:9,28-29; 15:1-16; 17:17; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:32; Romans 1:16-18; 2:4; 3:23-25; 4:3ff.; 5:8-10; 6:1-23; 8:1-18,29-39; 10:9-10,13; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18,30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:8-9; 9:24-28; 11:1-12:8,14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:2-23; 1 John 1:6-2:11; Revelation 3:20; 21:1-22:5.

Key Text:

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

Genesis 15:6: “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” (key text not in the article)

Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Matthew 1:21: “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

John 1:12-14: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 3:1-16

John 3:5: “Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 3:18: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 5:24: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

Acts 2:38: “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (key text not in the article)

Acts 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 16:31: “So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Romans 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “*The just shall live by faith.*”

2 Corinthians 5:17-21: “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of

reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Colossians 1:13-14: "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

Theological Observations

The whole of theology is bound up with our understanding of God, the world and ourselves. The manner in which we understand salvation decides and reveals the way in which we will think about God, and vice versa.

It is of great importance, and entirely biblical, that this article concerning salvation begins with the emphatic statement that "salvation involves the redemption of the whole man." This affirmation guards us against supposing that only our lower, physical desires are in need of remedy. The whole person needs a whole salvation.

The Scriptures teach us that our fallenness extends to the whole of our person: body, soul and spirit need redemption. The Son of God in his incarnation, death and resurrection took upon himself all that we are in order to redeem us. He was like us in every respect apart from sin.

This means, that salvation includes the resurrection of the body. The Christian hope is not that of an ethereal, disembodied existence, but the eternal life of a resurrected and transformed body (Rom 8:23).

As this article makes quite clear, salvation is found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. One must understand who He is and what He did, know Him by name, and call upon Him as Lord in order to be saved (Acts 4:12; Rom 10:14-17).

The saints prior to his coming perceived these things only dimly and partially, as they exercised faith in God's promises and as they believed in the Christ who was coming (1 Pet 1:10-12). In every age salvation has always been by grace through faith in the promise of God.

Now, however, the promise of God has come to fulfillment in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. It is the gospel of the Christ who has come which God has sent forth to the nations, a "Faith [that] comes by hearing, and hearing by the message of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

The Scriptures speak with varying perspectives on the salvation which God has wrought for us in Christ.

"Regeneration" has to do with God's having made us entirely new creatures in Christ: all that we are in ourselves was put to death with Him (2 Cor 5:17-21).

"Justification" has to do with the forgiveness of our sins and our acknowledgement of God's just claim against us that we are liars and transgressors (Rom 3:5-8, 21-26).

"Sanctification" has to do with God's possessing us as his own and setting us apart from the world which is condemned and defiled (1 Cor 1:30; 3:16-17; 6:19-20).

"Glorification" has to do with our future destiny as "sons of God" at the resurrection from the dead, when God's triumph in us shall be complete (Rom 8:28-30).

Regeneration, *BF&M* Article 4a

Scripture makes it clear, that salvation does not begin with us. We are “dead in sin” (Eph 2:1) and thus unable to save ourselves.

Instead, God begins the work that allows us to become new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). We call this work “regeneration” or “new birth” – that is, it is the act of God by which he imparts spiritual life resulting in salvation.

We first encounter the phrase “born again” in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (John 3). This phrase is so very descriptive of the work done in us in salvation. As we had no part in imparting life to ourselves at the time of our physical birth, likewise we have no part in imparting spiritual life to ourselves at the time of our new birth.

John 1:13 underscores this truth by stating that this birth is not due to “the will of man, but of God.”

Scripture speaks often of this new birth. It is described as made effectual through the Word of God (Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23), through the work of Christ on the cross (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13; 1 Pet 1:3) and through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8; Titus 3:5). The evidence of the new birth is seen in the changed life of the one who experiences it (2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 2:29; 5:4).

But how is the new birth appropriated? Jesus told Nicodemus, “you must be born again.”

In Scripture, the response needed is expressed in terms of repentance and faith. These two actions are often spoken of together under the heading of “conversion,” and both are needed for salvation. The term “conversion,” interestingly, does not appear in the article and is relatively rare in Scripture.

Repentance involves more than just remorse or a feeling of guilt over getting caught in sin. Rather, it refers to a genuine sorrow for sin accompanied by a desire and commitment to leave it behind. Or, as is often stated, it is “a change of mind that leads to a change of action.”

The awareness of the need to repent is brought about by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). Its importance is evidenced by its inclusion as a key element in the preaching of Jesus (Mark 1:15), John the Baptist (Matt 3:2) and the early church (Acts 2:38).

The noun “faith” comes from the same root word as the verb “I believe” in the Greek language of the New Testament. More than just acknowledging intellectually that something is true, biblical faith requires a personal trust in and commitment to Jesus based on the knowledge of who he is and what he has done in providing forgiveness for sin.

Often in the New Testament, the word “believe” is followed by the word “in” to express this idea. Most noticeably, John 3:16 states that whoever “believes in” Jesus will have everlasting life.

Paul also reminds us that it is because of God’s grace that we are saved through faith and not by our own works (Eph 2:8-9). No one of us could ever do enough “good deeds” to earn God’s salvation!

Taken together, regeneration and conversion are both foundational to the biblical teaching of salvation. God has graciously given us His spiritual life which we experience as we respond to him in repentance and faith.

An Important Theological Addition

The *BF&M* proclaims the uniqueness of salvation in Christ alone. The 2000 *BF&M* revision committee added a key sentence, “There is no salvation apart from personal faith

in Jesus Christ as Lord.” Twenty-first century American culture emphasizes the virtues of religious pluralism, universalism, and inclusivism. Religious pluralism teaches that all religions lead to God. Religious pluralism is possible only by denying core Christian truths such as the Trinity, the incarnation of Jesus, and the atonement. Religious pluralism ignores the conflicting truth claims of various world religions. Universalism entails the denial of human freedom-“God” saves all humanity regardless of a human response. Inclusivism teaches that Jesus is the only way of salvation but affirms that some individuals receive salvation without an explicit knowledge of Him and His saving work. Inclusivists claim that an individual, who responds positively to general revelation-including God’s revelation in other world religions-receives salvation. In contrast, Paul claims that all people reject God’s general revelation (Rom 1:18-20) and are lost apart from the gospel.

Jesus proclaimed Himself as the exclusive way to God. Using the very language of first-century religious pluralism, Jesus claimed to be “the one and only way, the one and only truth, and the one and only life” (John 14:6). The means of salvation is personal trust in the Saving One. These are the words of Jesus.

An Important Theological Tension

The statement regarding regeneration in the *BF&M* has become a contentious matter in the debate about Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention. Calvinists and non-Calvinists generally disagree about the order of events associated with salvation. Some Calvinists affirm that regeneration precedes repentance and faith. In this understanding, God regenerates and then the regenerate responds in repentance and faith. Non-Calvinists teach that repentance and faith precede regeneration. The 1925 *BF&M* stated, “It [regeneration] is a work of God’s free grace conditioned upon faith in Christ.”

An interpretive issue arises then in light of the wording of the current *BF&M*. What is the antecedent for the pronoun “which” in the clause “to which the sinner responds?” To what is the sinner responding? On one side, a Calvinist may understand the *BF&M* to teach that a sinner responds with repentance and faith to the “change in heart wrought by the Spirit.” On the other side, a non-Calvinist may understand the *BF&M* to teach that a sinner responds to “the conviction of sin” with repentance and faith.

Charles Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, modeled an irenic spirit on this contentious issue of the order of salvation. While Mohler affirms that regeneration precedes repentance and faith, Kelley and Land believe that repentance and faith precede regeneration. Although they personally interpret the *BF&M* statement on regeneration differently, these brothers joined hearts to serve on the *BF&M 2000* committee and to write a recent exposition of the *BF&M* published by LifeWay.

Baptists can unite on the truth that the Creator God is the source of spiritual life. Through the instrumentality of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit creates spiritual life, a radical change comparable to a new birth or new creation.

(Large portions of this study were adapted from articles by Mark Seifrid, David DeKlaven and Mark Rathel.)