

It is reported that George Whitefield, the great British evangelist, was speaking to a man about his soul. He asked the man, "Sir, what do you believe?"

"I believe what my church believes," the man replied.

The preacher tried again, "And what does your church believe?"

"The same thing I believe."

"And what do both of you believe?" the preacher inquired a third time.

"We both believe the same thing!" was the only reply he could get.

Some people know what they believe. And others do not. We are in a series of sermons that follows the Baptist Faith & Message. The Baptist Faith and Message is a summary of what most Southern Baptists believe. We are using the 1963 version.

There are some Christians who object to using a written statement of beliefs. The objection is usually that we should simply believe the Bible. There is some truth to that. All that we believe comes from the Bible, or is supposed to. We preach from the Bible. We do not preach from the Baptist Faith and Message. But while all of our doctrines come from the Bible, the Bible does not summarize them. Saying, "I believe the Bible" does not detail what you believe. People today disagree on what the Bible says. It is helpful then to have a summary such as the Baptist Faith and Message.

When Southern Baptists first organized themselves into a network of churches, in the year 1845, they did not put together a summary of beliefs. But one became necessary at the turn of the century in reaction to those who denied the Bible as trustworthy revelation from God. That is what led to the first Baptist Faith and Message, in 1925. Some years later another wave of agnostic writers began attacking the Bible. So in 1963 Southern Baptists updated the Baptist Faith and Message in response. We added to it in 1998 and then revised the whole thing in 2000.

#### **BF&M, Article IV. Salvation**

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, sanctification, and glorification.

1. 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. 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 into a relationship of peace and favor with God.

2. 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 perfection through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

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

*Gen. 3:15; Ex. 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matt. 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; Rom. 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 Cor. 1:18, 30; 6:19-20; 15:10; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; 5:22-25; 6:15; Ephes. 1:7; 2:8-22; 4:11-16; Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:9-22; 3:1ff.; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 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; Rev. 3:20; 21:1-22:5.*

**So Salvation has a beginning, a middle, and an end.** The beginning of anyone's salvation depends on a very definite action. This action consists of a person receiving Jesus as both Savior and Lord. This means trusting in the death of Jesus as the basis for the forgiveness of your sins and turning from sin in obedience to God.

For any of you, that may not be the moment you first believed you could be saved. The two events, your belief in Jesus and your receiving of Jesus, may occur at the same moment or be separated by any length of time. There are people who come to the belief that they are sinners in need of a Savior, and believe that Jesus is that Savior, but they are just not willing to give themselves to Jesus. I have known several who told me that no one was going to control their lives but them. These people understood their sin, understood the consequences of sin, and still chose not to trust themselves to Jesus.

You might be such a person. You like the church for the company, the moral atmosphere, the music, the friendships, the game nights, etc. You live as a good, moral person. But you are not willing to receive Jesus as Lord of your life.

I get that. I understand the hesitation. But it is a short-sighted way to live. Maybe you are thinking that when you are old and can no longer do whatever you want anyway that then you can give your life to Jesus. There are several problems with such thinking. First, you may not get that chance. People die every day with no advanced warning. On Wednesday of this week, several people were killed by a terrorist in England. In 2015, 520 people died in traffic collisions in Maryland. Several of you have been in serious collisions. It wasn't your fault. And you could have been killed. Next time you might be. Any one of us could be killed this week in some kind of accident.

Secondly, why do you think Jesus would accept your life under those circumstances? You aren't saying, "Wow, Jesus, I sure do appreciate what you did for me!" Instead, you are saying, "Jesus, I want to sin a lot more. Then you can have whatever life I have left on earth." That doesn't show appreciation for Jesus giving His life for you.

Listen, Jesus did not die so you can purposely continue sinning and then go to heaven. Jesus died so you can live for God. You must give yourself to Jesus as Lord for salvation to begin.

Maybe you are hanging around at the door of that decision. You haven't yet decided to go through it. I urge you to stop hesitating. You will never regret saying yes to Jesus. But if you say no, you will regret it for an eternity.

As I said, **Salvation has a beginning. We were saved.**

At the beginning of your salvation you were:

Regenerated (given a new heart) (John 3:5-6; 2 Cor. 5:17)

Redeemed (Eph. 1:7)

Justified (Ro. 5:1)

Reconciled to God (Col. 1:21-22)

Adopted (Ro. 8:15)

Indwelt (John 14:17)

and Sealed (Eph. 1:13)

Let's look at justification for a bit this morning. Justification is being declared "not guilty" in God's court. We are acquitted of the charges of sin against us. We are declared "not guilty" by God because we are now dressed in the righteousness of Jesus.

There is a funny story of some years back that illustrates this concept. It seems that there was a man in England who put his Rolls-Royce on a boat and went across to the continent of Europe to go on a vacation. This was before the tunnel connecting England and France. For those of you who don't know, a Rolls-Royce is a very luxurious, very expensive, finely crafted, hand built automobile. It is supposed to be one of the finest cars in the world.

While he was driving around Europe, something happened to the motor of his car. He notified the Rolls-Royce people back in England and asked, "I'm having trouble with my car; what do you suggest I do?" Well, the Rolls-Royce people flew a mechanic over to Europe. The mechanic repaired the car and flew back to England and left the man to continue his vacation.

As you can imagine, the fellow was wondering, "How much is this going to cost me?" So when he got back to England, he wrote the people a letter and asked how much he owed them. He received a letter from the office that read: "Dear Sir: There is no record anywhere in our files that anything ever went wrong with a Rolls-Royce."

That is a picture of our justification. There is no longer any record in heaven of our sins. They have all been forgiven. When God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Jesus. Righteousness means a right relationship with God. Justification is God's decision to declare sinners righteous who receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. This exchange of sins for righteousness is pictured in...

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)** For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

When you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, your salvation begins. All of the actions listed take place in a moment. Your status in heaven is changed forever. But that is just the beginning of your salvation.

Salvation has a beginning. We were saved. **Salvation has a middle. We are being saved.** When we put our faith in Jesus, Jesus announces that we now belong to Him. This is the start of sanctification.

We are forgiven of sins at conversion. We must now learn of those sins from the Holy Spirit and rid ourselves of them. This is sanctification. **Sanctification is the process of**

**becoming holy.** Something is holy when it is completely dedicated to God's glory and use. God makes us holy by His Spirit in us. Part of this is described in...

**Romans 8:29 (NIV)** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...

**In the sanctification process God is giving us victory over sin and changing our character to match that of Jesus.**

This is a long process. God justifies us in an instant. But He takes a long time to make us holy. This is because you have a part to play in becoming holy. Your part in sanctification is to learn what holiness includes and cooperate with God's work to make you holy. You must get rid of sin in you. Paul calls it "Putting sin to death."

This process is pictured well by Gordon MacDonald, in his book Ordering Your Private World. In this book he writes: "Some years ago, when Gail and I bought the old abandoned New Hampshire farm we now call Peace Ledge, we found the site where we wished to build our country home strewn with rocks and boulders. It was going to take a lot of hard work to clear it all out so there could be grass and plants. The first phase of the clearing process was easy. The big boulders went fast. And when they were gone, we began to see that there were a lot of smaller rocks that had to go too. But when we had cleared the site of the boulders and the rocks, we noticed all of the stones and pebbles we had not seen before. This was much harder, more tedious work. But we stuck to it, and there came the day when the soil was ready for planting grass."

He goes on to explain how the Lord works like that in revealing our sin. When we are first saved, the Lord points out some big, glaring sins and we get to work repenting of them. We feel pretty good about ourselves until He reveals other, less obvious sins. And there are many of these. That process goes on and on and on.

If you have gotten to the point that you don't see any more sin in you, you are not being honest with God. You are not walking close to Him. You are no longer growing in Christ. For the work of the Spirit is to keep revealing our sins so they can be put to death. Sanctification is an ongoing process. Sin runs deep and wide in us and takes a long time to dig it out.

Salvation has a beginning. We were saved. Salvation has a middle. We are being saved. And **Salvation has a completion. We will be saved.** Look at what we are waiting for.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV)** For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

When Jesus returns, not only will we be changed into our resurrection bodies and join Him, but we will receive glory with Him.

**2 Thessalonians 2:14 (NIV)** He called you to this (salvation) through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To illustrate us receiving glory with Jesus I remind you that when President Trump was inaugurated, his family was with him. They were all there on the platform. They shared in the glory he received that day, even though they had not been elected to anything.

When Jesus returns, the world will know who He is. And His followers will be there with Him. We will receive glory with Him even though we did not die for the sins of the world. We will share in His glory. This is God's promise. This is glorification.

We received salvation in the past, are receiving it in the present, and will see its completion in the future.

All of this and more can be yours if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Today is the best day to say yes to Jesus. You may not get another chance. I urge you to say yes to Jesus today.