

## **God's Purpose of Grace - Election - Baptist Faith & Message, Article 5a**

*by Thomas Nettles*

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This article of the Baptist Faith and Message is a noble condensation of a [beautiful](#) biblical and historically Baptist doctrine. "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners."

The four elements of salvation discussed in Article 4 of the BF&M arise from God's purpose of grace in election. Election pulsates with the infinite grace of God.

Sinners, justly condemned and God's enemies, when left to themselves persevere in their hostile ways all the way to hell. In pursuance of his gracious purpose, however, God's particular love rests on certain ones to bring them to salvation (Eph 1:4, 5; 2:4, 5). "Whom he foreknew (that is 'loved beforehand'), he also predestined" (Rom 8:29).

The confession rightly calls God's saving choice "gracious," for it operates for the good of sinners in spite of their infinite demerit. God's election cannot fail. He administers his decree all the way to the glorification of sinners and to the glory of his beloved Son.

"Just as He chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him." What more glorious end can be imagined than a predestination "to be conformed to the image of his Son?"

Election does not contradict the "free agency of man." When a person acts, he acts freely - or exactly as he is disposed to act. While dead in trespasses and sins, he is a slave to sin. Sin reigns in his mortal body, and he has no desire for righteousness.

Regeneration by the Spirit of God shatters the shackles of sin and its tyrannical power by creating such distaste for sin that the sinner repents. The Spirit implants such a desire for righteousness that the sinner turns to Christ, by whose blood and righteousness sinners may justly be accepted.

Thus, the elect person acts freely and in accord with a spiritual sight sovereignly induced by God's Spirit in accordance with God's electing purpose, when God's choice is manifest in the coming of the gospel with power. In this way, election "comprehends all means in connection with the end" (Eph 2:1-8; Rom 6:12,18, 20; 1 Thess 1:4, 5).

Election manifests God's "sovereign goodness" by displaying his mercy and his justice. Since election results in eternal praise to his glory (Eph 1:14), it is infinitely wise.

Because election marks out the beloved Son as the only acceptable propitiation, it is infinitely holy. In that all those eternally given to the Son will come, while not one fails, it is unchangeable (John 6:37-40).

Such a display of sovereign goodness humbles its recipient to the dust and absolutely excludes any synergy in this salvation, and renders boasting of any sort an utter nullity.

F. H. Kerfoot, a Southern Baptist theologian and pastor at the turn of the 20th Century, highlighted this doctrine when he wrote, "Nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the 'doctrines of grace': the absolute sovereignty and foreknowledge of God; His eternal and unchangeable purposes or decrees; that salvation in its beginning, continuance and completion, is God's free gift; that, in Christ, we are elected or chosen, personally or individually, from eternity, saved and called out from the world, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; ... Read Rom 8, 9, 10, 11; Acts 13:48; Eph 1:4-5; 2:1?10; 1 Pet 1:2?5; Jude 24; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5."

## **God's Purpose of Grace - Perseverance**

### **Baptist Faith and Message, Article 5b**

***by Chad Brand***

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In Alfred Hitchcock's famous movie, "The Man Who Knew Too Much," Doris Day croons, "When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, what would I be? Would I be pretty; would I be rich? Here's what she said to me. ..."

The answer of this supposedly wise mother, designed somehow to bring comfort is, "Que sera, sera; whatever will be, will be," or, "It is all in the hands of blind fate."

For the serious Christian, of all the questions that might cause us concern, none is so important as the question, "What will the outcome of my Christian life be? Will God be pleased with me to the end of my days and so finally save me?" Needless to say, "whatever will be, will be" is not adequate for most of us as an answer to that question.

There are really two questions here. First, will all of those who have placed genuine faith in Jesus be finally saved? Second, how can I be sure that I have placed genuine faith in him? While the second question is of vital importance, we can only examine the first one here.

Two answers have been given to this question because there are two kinds of passages that address the issue. First, there are passages that warn us of the danger of falling. These include texts such as Hebrews 6:4-6, 1 Timothy 1:19 and 2 Peter 2:20-22 - passages which, read in one way, might be taken to teach that Christians may fall away from salvation and so be finally lost.

Those who give these texts preeminence in answering the question conclude that real believers, those born again of the Holy Spirit, might yet repudiate their faith, so becoming unbelievers and finally be lost to eternal damnation. This interpretation seems to have intuitive support as well, since most of us have known people who started in the faith, but who eventually fell away.

Before we react too strongly against this view, we must first recognize that these warning verses are real texts which are actually in the Bible, and so it is important for us to take them seriously as we attempt to develop our understanding of perseverance.

Bible students also discover texts that make it abundantly clear that genuine believers will prevail to the end. These include Romans 8:31-39, 2 Timothy 1:12, John 10:27-30 and John 6:37-40.

Anyone reading these passages will be struck by the fact that they warrant that those who belong to the Lord will certainly endure to the end and that that endurance is due not to their ability, but to God's power to keep them.

Note Jesus' words in John 6:37-40: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day."

The sequence here is clear: All that the Father gives to Jesus come to him; all who come to him are received by him; all who are received by him will be genuinely saved; those who are truly saved will all be raised on the last day. The passages in Romans 8 and John 10 are equally forceful, as are many other texts in Scripture.

What are we to do then with the warning passages? Since they are in the Bible, we must take their message seriously. What is the point they are making? Just how do these apparently disparate texts fit together? Or do they? Perhaps there is simply an

"irreconcilable difference" between the two kinds of passages. Bible-believing Christians do not believe that is so.

First John 2:19 provides a clue: "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us." John is talking about some people who seemed to be genuine Christians, persons who were even teachers in the church.

Yet, they finally fell away, showing that their "faith" and their "profession" were not genuine. That means that not everyone in the church who claims to be a Christian disciple is in fact genuinely saved. There are tares among the wheat, and at some point that will become obvious.

The BF&M states that genuine believers may "fall into sin through neglect and temptation," but they will finally persevere, since "they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

You may call this eternal security or "once saved, always saved" or even "perseverance of the saints," but we might better call it "the perseverance of God," since he is the one who keeps us by his power unto final salvation and eternal glory.

The hope of the believer is not, "Que sera, sera," but "What God has said will be." He has said that all whom he has given to Jesus, all who truly come to him, he will never cast out. That is a promise on which we can construct all our hopes and expectations.



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