



FIRST BAPTIST of Hayden

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**The Baptist Faith and Message
Grace**

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Preface

From the earliest days of the New Testament Church, the issue of grace and its effect and purpose have been debated. There were those who believed that by God's grace, we were saved to be sinless. Some believed God's grace was expressed in the Law, which acted as a file to polish and smooth the sinful behavior of the individual until he was polished and pure of any defect. Thus, sinlessness was possible. However, because of our habitual sinning and the example set for us by Adam, there came a time when not even the Law could free people from the habit of sinning.

As a result, sinning in spite of the Law's prohibition, Christ would be required to intervene. By the redemptive work of his death and resurrection, we were freed from the condemnation of our sin. Unfortunately, the long-term effect of our ingrained sin habits needed to be dealt with. So, in the work of Christ, the Law of God was revealed once again, and the example of Christ inspires the believer to exercise his will to overcome his sinful habits.

In this theological framework, there is no original sin nature, only sinful habits that can be eventually overcome leading to a sinless life. That was God's grace according to a man named Pelagius, who would eventually be seen as a heretic in the church.

Others saw God's grace as a license to sin. The attitude from the flesh that used God's grace as a tool to act in ways contrary to God's revealed will.

This idea was prevalent in a number of churches and would reach its apex in the Roman Catholic church when indulgences were pre-sold to forgive a person for a sin he was contemplating even before the act was committed. This, in effect, made the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount of little to no effect, when he taught that what we do in our heart is as sinful as the act itself.

The purpose of grace was to present to sinful men God's favor, even though we had no capacity to earn it or to grasp hold of it. God presents it as a gift that is activated when, by faith, we trust his promise that is found in Jesus.

So, let us review partially the Fifth Article of our Baptist Faith and Message (BFM): God's Purpose of Grace.

Our Baptist Distinctives:

5. God's Purpose of Grace

BFM: 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.

Our Baptist Faith and Message begins this section with the word 'election.' We need to spend a little time on that before we look more thoroughly at grace.

Election is the doctrine whereby men who were dead in their trespasses and sin, dead to God, dead to righteousness, dead to all that is godly, are preselected and called by God's grace into everlasting life.

Certain theologians would say, it this way;

T – Total Depravity of man. Man is a sinner and wholly and without remedy apart from God’s intervention separated from God.

U – Unconditional Election. Also known as “Sovereign Election,” this is the teaching that God’s rescuing of sinners is entirely due to His own will and good pleasure (Ephesians 1:5). Salvation is not brought about in any way by our actions or decisions.

Remember, Scripture teaches that we are spiritually dead. Because of this we cannot and will not turn towards God on our own. Instead, it is God who elects believers to salvation (Romans 8:28-30). He does this based solely on His grace and not our works (2 Timothy 1:9).

Believers were chosen by God *“before the foundation of the world”* (Ephesians 1:3-6). This further emphasizes our inability to earn salvation by our works, since election predates our very existence.

L – Limited Atonement. Also known as Definite Atonement. Jesus’ death on the cross did not merely make salvation possible for those who choose to receive it, but that it made salvation definite for those who have been elected by God. His sacrifice is completely sufficient to save sinners, but it is made definite only for those whom God has chosen.

I – Irresistible Grace. God’s grace is irresistible to the elect and cannot be ignored by any who are the elect. All who are called by God to believe in Jesus will be saved. In John 6:37 Christ states, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me,”* and in John 6:39, *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”*

P – Perseverance of the Saints. Salvation is eternally secure, because it is fully and completely the work of God. All who are the elect of God and who have responded in faith to the grace of God offered in Christ, will not fall away, nor will they succumb to the allurements of the world, but they will persevere to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are traditionally called the five points of Calvinism, or the doctrine of grace, which was made popular by John Calvin as a young man in Geneva Switzerland. Calvin lived from 1509-1564.

Our Baptist heritage did not always hold to the theology of predestination in the same sense taught by Calvin and his disciples, nor did Baptists believe that the covenant of salvation was attained by infant baptism – a doctrine taught by the Calvinists as part of their theology of predestination. Many Baptists were persecuted by Calvin in Geneva and were driven from the city. The same was true in the New World as colonies were established; those who held to baptistic doctrines were persecuted and driven from the colonies.

A farmer/pastor named Roger Williams, after facing persecution from the Anglican church, established a new colony called Providence, which would eventually become Rhode Island. A colony based upon separation of church and state. Williams believed that the state had no part in religious ceremonies or the policies of the church to conduct religious duties. Because he held to the conviction of a free conscience regarding religion, he was forced to leave Massachusetts and he founded a new colony, and the first Baptist church in America would be established there.

The history of the state influencing the church and having authority over the church came directly from the Roman Catholic and the Reformed churches of Europe.

Within Baptist life, there has consistently been a tension regarding the doctrine of election and predestination, freedom of choice and God's sovereignty, and how it functions practically within church polity.

The following was written by Mark McClellan in 2013 for the Southern Baptist of Oklahoma.

- For centuries, Baptist Confessions of Faith have entitled their understanding of election as "God's Purpose of Grace."

In fact, these historic confessions of faith are not only in agreement, but they also have used nearly the exact wording of that article for almost two centuries.

Article V of the BF&M 2000 (like Article V—1963 BF&M; Article X—1925 BF&M; Article V—1833 New Hampshire Confession) states that, *“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.”*

That is an intentionally broad statement for Southern Baptists. Despite the agreement in the confessions and the broad statement, it would be fair to say that the doctrine of election and related biblical teachings of predestination cause a great deal of discussion and disagreement. Briefly and not exhaustively, let’s see why.

The two biblical and theological truths that are essential (not to mention challenging) in this doctrine are the sovereignty of God and human responsibility (or the free agency of man). Both are biblically affirmed, but both are understood differently by distinct theological traditions within Baptist life, which are essentially Reformed (or Calvinist) and Arminian (or some form of it).

This doctrine, along with certain other biblical doctrines, such as the Trinity or the Incarnation, is a complex doctrine, and there is a sense of divine mystery in how to explain and understand it.

These two theological traditions use a number of biblical texts to support their positions, but we have room here for only a few texts.

“Election” in this BF&M article is choosing someone(s) for salvation from beginning to end. There are biblical passages which teach that God chooses, or elects, people unto salvation from eternity past. (Eph. 1:4-5) There are also biblical passages which teach that people are called to make a decision to be saved. (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38) There are several approaches to explain this. One, “compatibilism” is a position that understands divine sovereignty to be consistent, or compatible, with human responsibility. Simply put, they may appear to be in conflict, but they work together, even though we may not be able to explain to everyone’s satisfaction just exactly how this works.

There is disagreement about the basis of God’s election. Was it because He foresaw those who would believe (foreseen faith) and affirmed their free will choice (conditional election), making them the elect (Arminian position)? Or did God choose those whom He would save based on His own free will and divine purposes with no regard for merit or foreseen faith (unconditional election)? (Reformed or Calvinist position). (Eph. 1:12; I Thess. 1:2, 4) It would appear from the confession that election is not from any personal merit (but by grace) because it “excludes boasting.”

Article V includes the means God uses in salvation and not just the end of it. (More of a Reformed position) The Arminian position holds that God does not ordain the means of salvation, but He ordains the end – salvation. Importantly, both positions hold that, when evangelizing, we must seek to be clear and persuasive in presenting the Gospel and inviting people to believe in Jesus. Nonetheless, we pray for God to convict people of their sin and draw the hearts of people to Himself. (Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30)

We are called, regardless, to proclaim the Gospel, because the elect are not saved apart from it.

As a pastor, I hold to a general call that went into the whole world at the crucifixion of Christ. *“If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me...”* In that call is God’s sovereign plan of humanity’s redemption, that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

This is not the egg-headed theological position that many in our seminaries hold to as if they have an exclusive corner on truth. As I asked a Calvinist many years ago, “Why are there no Calvinist predestined for hell?” It seems reasonable that at least some who claim Calvin’s doctrine would be a part of the predestined to damnation. Nor is it the current fashionable trend among young pastors and millennial men, who call themselves Calvinists, or more appropriately, “the elect.”

So the idea of grace then for the Calvinist, and in this article of our BFM, is that it is limited to only those who are the elect of God, predestined to be born again by the sovereign will of God, without possibility of rejection or refusal.

Thus, the purpose of God's grace is the election of the predestined unto salvation. I challenge this position and hold to a different view of election, predestination and God's grace.

I will deal with it in a more biblical way next time and see if we can come to a better understanding of our heritage and our doctrine.

Additional Scripture:

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7,19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10,19; Hebrews 11:39–12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2-5,13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.