



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Predestination (Part One)

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ **And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.** Romans 8:28-30 NRSV

“I just follow the plain meaning of the words of scripture.” I’ve heard many Christians make such statements over the years as if the written English language, or any language, has never been subject to more than one interpretation. Take for example the following sentence, ‘There is one God.’ Certainly that can be understood to be a statement of absolute belief for Jews, Christians and Muslims. However, to a nonbeliever it could be an expression of the speaker’s perceived reality. ‘There is one God for the Jews.’ ‘There is one God for the Christians.’ ‘There is one God for the Muslims.’ Indeed, there is presently a controversy playing itself out in Illinois over whether Jews and Christians worship the same ‘God’ as Muslims. (BTW, they do. There is only one God and while we may disagree about God’s will in some things, we all worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to which the Christian’s add Jesus and the Muslim’s add Muhammad.)

Consider another set of sentences that demonstrate that we always bring our knowledge of the world as necessary background to understand written language.

“That man over there will lead this group to the warehouse filled with the lead bars. Another man has already led the first group to the warehouse of lead bars. Once there, they’re going to pick-up their share of the lead bars and take them over there to the furnace.”

To a non-native speaker this simple short paragraph is almost incomprehensible. We glance at it and understand it at once. Our context immediately allows us to choose the correct interpretation of the identical, or phonetically identical, words. Now, consider the fact that when we read the bible we are reading translations of three different languages (Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic) written in a context between 2000 and 4000 years ago. Even though we are given the benefit of the translators’ selection of words to interpret the original language, we must still seek to place the statement in the context of the writer to begin the process of interpreting the words for our time and place. Even the bible acknowledges that it can be subject to differing interpretations. For example the author of Second Peter had this to say about the letters of Paul:

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ speaking of this as he does in all his letters. **There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.** ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. 2 Peter 3:14-17 NRSV

As we look at the historic dispute between the Reformed Theology of the Reformation and Methodism keep this problem of biblical interpretation in mind.

Reformed theology grew out of the concerns of the Reformation. Martin Luther and John Calvin, two of the principal leaders of the Reformation, wished to emphasize that salvation was an act of God and not something that could be manipulated by the works of humankind. Salvation came through the Grace of God and from Faith alone. They turned to a theological principle first stated by Augustine. Augustine stated that God had elected some portion of humankind for salvation and it was these elect who gained the benefit of God's gracious act in Jesus Christ. Augustine relied upon the scriptures of the Old Testament that described God's election of the People of Israel; other Old Testament passages that referred to the saving of a faithful remnant; and passages like the one from Romans 8 above that speak of a people 'foreknown' by God, 'predestined' by God or 'elected' by God. A corollary of Augustine's theology was that some portion of humankind was elected for damnation. It was argued that this was not unjust on God's part because humankind had no claim on the mercy of God. Humankind's sins carried the punishment of damnation and God was not required to offer mercy to all.

The principal tenets of Reformed Theology came to be taught using the acronym TULIP.

- T: Total Depravity** of humankind. Humankind was marked by the original sin of Adam and Eve and lived their lives in sin. There is nothing that it can do to effect its salvation.
- U: Unconditional Election.** God, being under no obligation to grant anyone grace, nevertheless elected some people for salvation. This grant of mercy was not predicated on any worth of the individual (see Total Depravity) and was not dependent upon anything they did after election.
- L: Limited Atonement.** Although Christ's atonement would have been sufficient for the sins of all humankind, Christ did not die for the sins of the world, but only for the sins of the elect. Hence his atoning sacrifice was limited.
- I: Irresistible Grace.** No one can resist the Grace of God. In other words, no one can say to God, "No thank-you, I do not wish to be among those elected for salvation. I do not accept your gift of salvation." If God elects you for salvation, you are saved.
- P: Perseverance of the Saints:** Once saved, always saved. You cannot lose your salvation.

The precepts of Reformation Theology were consolidated into what became known as the Westminster Confession in 1646. Reformed theology, with variations in interpretation and justification, is still a basis for many Christian traditions today including the Presbyterian and Lutheran.

At the time of the Reformation the principal opposition to Reformed theology came from Roman Catholicism. Different Christian theologies would arise in the centuries following the Reformation. One of those theologies came to be expressed by the Church of England which had roots in both the Protestant Reformation and Catholicism. The Methodist Societies, established by John Wesley, grew out of the Church of England. Next week we'll examine the clash between Wesley's Theology of Grace and the Reformation's Theology of Election.

Wesley's Advice on Voting

The English Parliamentary election in the Fall of 1773 was one of the most significant in British history. Among the candidates was the eminent Edmund Burke who was running in his first election and who would become one of the most famous legislators in British history. Another of the candidates was an American born Englishman named Henry Cruger. Among the issues being debated was how best to deal with the unrest in the American Colonies. Wesley told his Methodists to approach the exercise of their sovereign franchise thoughtfully and without rancor.

Thur. October 6, 1773.—I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them (1) to vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; (2) to speak no evil of the person they voted against; and (3) to take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.

Although not explicitly biblical advice, Wesley is speaking about how Christians should approach any duty and how they should deal with those with whom they disagree. It is advice that we should take seriously today, especially point (3).

THURSDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

[**Due to a conflict with a Conference sponsored event, there will be no Bible Study on February 25th**]. Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have concluded our study of Mark and Matthew and have begun a study of Luke.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Mac McAfee	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood		Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;

- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

February 28th: Mad Men, Falling Towers and Fig Trees: My wife is fond of telling me that I should snap my fingers when I change the topic of conversation unexpectedly. If you are prone to do sudden changes in topic take heart: Jesus did it all the time. My texts are Isaiah 55:1–9 and Luke 13:1–9.

March 6th: Sermon: No One Would Give Him Anything. Jesus told parables to make people think. They often contain conflicting ideas and attack common assumptions about the nature of God. They also contain layers of meaning. When Christians think of Hell they often think in terms of fire. But this parable offers a different concept, one with which we have become familiar. My texts are 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 and Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32

Worship Leader's Schedule

February 28

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Larry Eastwood & Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

March 6

Jason Aldred, **Liturgist**

Sam Richardon & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Ushers**

Announcements

Upcoming activities for the children's ministry:

Easter Egg Hunt

This year's event will take place Saturday, March 26 at 10:00 AM. We'll have a few activities indoors as the children are gathering prior to releasing them to the hunt.

Needs: 1. Individually wrapped candies with which to stuff the eggs. (No chocolate please).
2. A bounce house.

Want to help?

1. Join the fun Sunday, March 20 after church for fellowship and to stuff the eggs.
2. Come on Easter Egg Hunt day at 8:30 AM to do a little decorating and a little egg hiding.
3. Invite your friends, neighbors, relatives to join us for this great day.

Vacation Bible School

Needs: A volunteer to head up this year's VBS. There are benefits for being the leader including choosing the date and the theme. Not to worry, you won't be alone. Many of our members look forward to helping with this event as well.

Children's Ministries

Our church is in a period of discernment with respect to our children's ministries. The Nelsons gave us such a fantastic gift in honor of our beloved Nanette. Please continue to pray for us as we determine how best to use it in her honor and to continue Trinity's legacy of "Living as, and leading others to become, Disciples of Jesus Christ."

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is beginning a new study this Sunday. We will be involved in a six-session study, "Fire On The Mountain" by noted teacher and historian, Ray Vander Laan. This study includes a DVD that is filmed on locations including the Red Sea, Sinai and other ancient places. One of the ideas that we will be exploring is the freedom that we have and how we use it in community with God's people and in relation to God.

We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in February

Donnie Hartsock, Joyce Edwards, Bert Winton, Maurice Edwards, Jeanne Rybolt, Patricia Stevens,
Rodger Klein, Eric Crowell

Happy Birthday to each of you!