

PONDERING GOD WITH PRESBYTERIANS:

**What do we believe
and why?**

Martha Moore-Keish

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PLAN FOR OUR DISCUSSION

- What “we” believe:
 - Christians:
The Trinity?
 - Protestants:
Justification?
 - Presbyterians/Reformed Protestants:
Predestination?

ON THE TRINITY

**WAIT . . . *GOD IN THREE
PERSONS?***

TROUBLES WITH THE TRINITY

JESUS' BAPTISM AND THE TRINITY

Mark 1:9-11:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

HOW DO YOU SAY BOTH . . .

**“In the beginning was the
Word, and the Word was with
God, and the Word was God.”**

John 1:1

**“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our
God, the Lord alone.”**

Deuteronomy 6:4

THE NICENE CREED (325, REVISED 381)

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father. . . .

WHAT ABOUT THE SPIRIT?

**“NO SOONER DO I CONCEIVE OF THE ONE THAN
I AM ILLUMINED BY THE SPLENDOR OF THE
THREE; NO SOONER DO I DISTINGUISH THEM
THAN I AM CARRIED BACK TO THE ONE”**

Gregory of Nazianzus, 4th century

WHAT DOES THE TRINITY MEAN FOR OUR LIVES?

In prayer?

In social life?

For the life of the world?

JUSTIFICATION?

What are we talking about?

ROMANS 3: 9-11, 21-24

“[A]ll, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:
“There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding; there is no one who seeks God.”

“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now ***justified*** by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..”

JUSTIFICATION IN THE 16TH CENTURY

WE ARE JUSTIFIED ON ACCOUNT OF CHRIST. Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God's judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit of ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge. For what is clearer than what Paul said: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23 f.).

WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH ALONE. But because we receive this justification, not through any works, but through faith in the mercy of God and in Christ, we therefore teach and believe with the apostle that sinful man is justified by faith alone in Christ, not by the law or any works. For the apostle says: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28).

Second Helvetic Confession, in *Book of Confessions* 5.107 and 5.109

**SO DOES
JUSTIFICATION MEAN
THAT WE JUST HAVE TO
BELIEVE HARD
ENOUGH?**

**. . . One dangerous
misunderstanding**

**SO DOES
JUSTIFICATION MEAN
THAT WE DON'T HAVE
TO DO ANYTHING?**

**. . . Another dangerous
misunderstanding**

**“CHOSEN FROM BEFORE THE
FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH”?**

Predestination and election

**“WHO WILL BRING
ANY CHARGE
AGAINST GOD’S
ELECT?”**

ROMANS 8:33

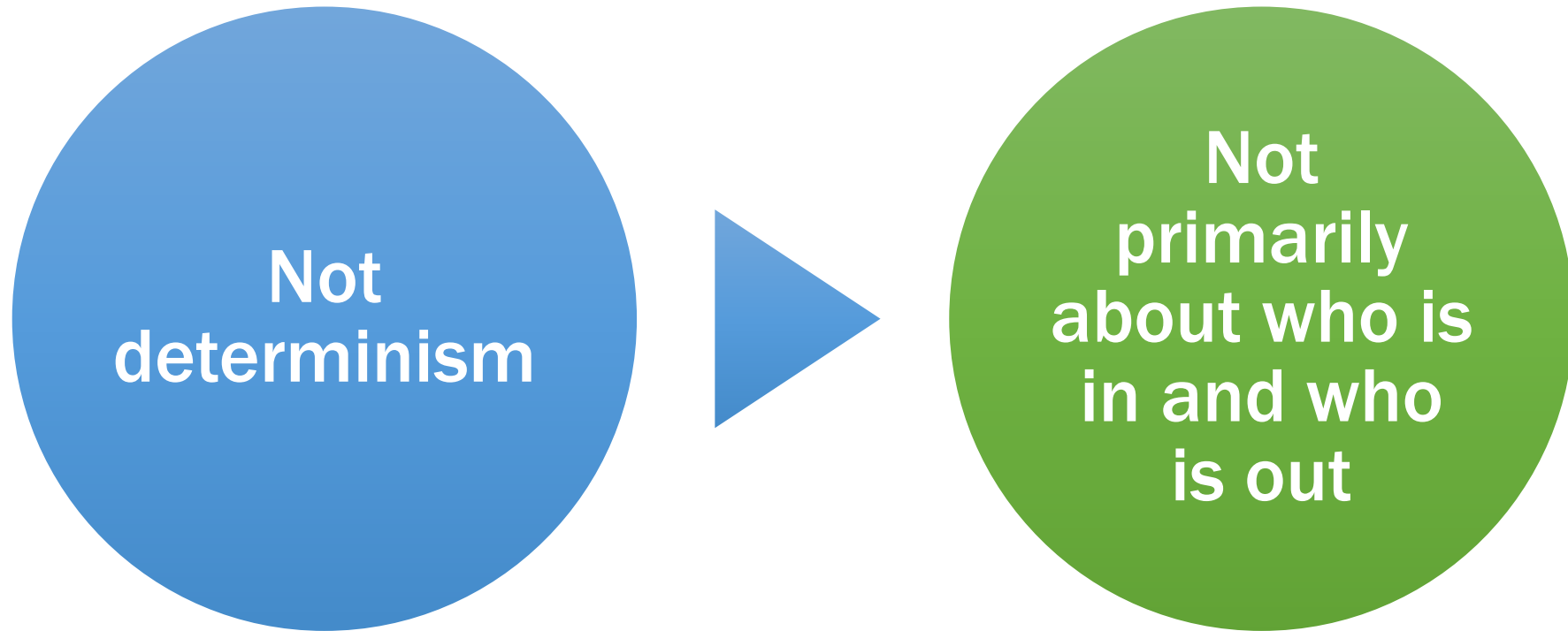
(But what does it mean to be
“elect”?)

PREDESTINATION: BASIC DEFINITION

God's determination of the ultimate destiny or "destination" of each person

Calvin: "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each [person]."

MISUNDERSTANDINGS . . .



HISTORY OF TEACHING ON ELECTION/PREDESTINATION

Matt. 22:14: “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

Romans 8:29-30: “those whom he foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son . . . and those whom he predestined he also called . . .”

HISTORY OF TEACHING ON ELECTION/PREDESTINATION

**Relationship of Jacob and Esau
in Romans 9:11-12: “Even
before they had been born or
had done anything good or bad
(so that God’s purpose of
election might continue, not by
works, but by his call),
[Rebecca] was told, ‘The elder
shall serve the younger.’”**

HISTORY OF TEACHING ON ELECTION/PREDESTINATION

Ephesians 1:3-6: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he ***chose us in Christ*** before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He ***destined us*** for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

HISTORY OF TEACHING ON ELECTION/PREDESTINATION

AUGUSTINE

PELAGIUS

CALVIN ON PREDESTINATION

Affirms:

God's mercy

God's glory

Our humility

MORE CALVIN . . .

Predestination is NOT based on
God's foreknowledge

It is in order to be holy, NOT
because we are already holy

Beware of judging whether
others are elect!

WHAT IS ELECTION/PREDESTINATION TRYING TO AFFIRM?

Scripture is reliable

God chooses us first and freely

God is just

God is good

Sin is serious

Humans are responsible

Salvation depends on grace alone

Salvation is secure

SOME OBJECTIONS . . .

To election in general

- Leaves no room for “free will” to have ultimate force in determining salvation

To “double predestination” in particular

- Seems to emerge independently of Jesus Christ
- Seems to emphasize divine justice over love
- Can lead to judgment of others

ALTERNATIVES . . .

To any doctrine of election:

- God gives us laws to follow, and if we do, we will be saved
- We can ask for faith and open ourselves to God's salvation, and God will help us

To double predestination:

- Barth: God elects Jesus Christ, and in him, all are elect (but Barth stops short of universalism)
- God has elected all for ultimate salvation

THE GOOD NEWS OF ELECTION

Election is about a community, not just individuals

Election is a call to service, not an assurance of privilege

Salvation is God's work, not ours

IN CONCLUSION:

God IS love
(the Trinity)

God loves us in
spite of
ourselves
(justification)

God's love for us
empowers us to
go out and love
others (election)

QUESTIONS?