

Ambrosius Mediolanensis

by John Gill

Ambrose's views on predestination emphasize God's election and grace, rather than human merit.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "Predestination", "Sovereign Grace"

Description

John Gill discusses the teachings of Ambrose of Milan regarding predestination, emphasizing that Ambrose believed in God's sovereign choice in calling individuals to faith and salvation. He highlights Ambrose's assertion that while all are called, only the elect can truly perceive and respond to God's call. Gill notes that Ambrose maintained a balance between the assurance of salvation for the elect and the humility required for all believers, acknowledging the mystery of God's election. The sermon underscores the importance of grace in salvation, which is not based on human merit but on God's predestined plan. Ultimately, Gill affirms that Ambrose's teachings align with the biblical doctrine of predestination, offering comfort and security to the faithful.

Transcript

The

CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH.

Part 4

Chapter 1--Of Predestination

Section 17--Ambrosius Mediolanensis. A.D. 380.

Ambrose, bishop of Milain, flourished under the emperors Gratian and Theodosius, and died A.D. 397. Austin,[1] who was converted under him, and was acquainted with him personally, as well as with his writings, thought him to be of the same judgment with himself about predestination, and cites[2] several passages from him for that purpose, such as these:[3] "Whom God esteems worthy of honor he calls, et quem vult religiosum facit, 'and whom he pleases he makes religious.'" And again; "If he would, si voluisset ex indevotis devotos fecisset, of persons not devoted to him, he could make them devoted."

From whence he concludes, that he could be no stranger to the doctrine of predestination, preached by the apostles, and which he defended. Moreover, there are many expressions in his writings which show

his sense of this doctrine: on those words of Sarah, The Lord hath restrained me from bearing, he has this note;[4] "By which," says he, "you may know, in predestinatione fuisse semper ecclesiam Dei, 'that in predestination the church of God always has been;' and that the fruitfulness of faith is prepared, whenever the Lord shall command it to break forth, but by the will of the Lord it is reserved for a certain time."

He[5] owns indeed, that "rewards are proposed not to the elect only, but to all, because Christ is all and in all." But he affirms,[6] that though "all men can hear, yet all cannot perceive with their ears, nisi electi Dei, 'only the elect of God;'" therefore the Savior says, He that hath ears to hear--all men have not those ears." To electing grace, and not to men's works, he refers salvation; "the remnant, he observes,[7] are saved, not by their own works, but by the election of grace."

He sometimes, indeed, represents election as a secret with God, and unknown to men: "As no one," he says,[8] "of whatsoever age, ought to despair, if he is desirous of being converted to the Lord, so none should be secure on the account of faith alone; but should rather fear, through what is added, many are called but few are chosen. That we are called by faith, we know; but whether we are elected to eternal life, we know not; so much, therefore, ought every one to be the more humble, as much as he is ignorant, whether he is elected."

However, this proves that he held the doctrine of an election of particular persons; and at other times he argues from it, to the great comfort of the saints, with respect to their safety and security. "We must not despair," says he,[9] "that the members can cleave to their own head, especially since ab initio simus praedestinati, we are predestinated from the beginning, unto the adoption of the children of God, by Jesus Christ, in himself; which predestination he hath proved, asserting that which from the beginning is before declared, Therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they both shall be one flesh, to be the mystery of Christ and the church."

There is a passage cited from this father by Vossius,[10] and from him by Dr. Whitby,[11] as asserting predestination upon the prescience of men's merits; where, explaining the text in Matthew 20:23, To sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, he has this note:[12] "He does not say, it is not mine to give, but it is not mine to give to you; not asserting that he wanted power, but the creature's merit. Take it otherwise: It is not mine to give you; that is, it is not mine, who came to teach humility; it is not mine, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; it is not mine, who keep righteousness, not grace."

Moreover, referring to the Father, he adds, to whom it is prepared; that he might show, that the Father also does not use to pay regard to petitions, but to merits, for God is no acceptor of persons. Hence the apostle said, whom he hath foreknown and predestinated; for he did not predestinate before he foreknew; sed quorum merita praescivit, eorum premia praedestinavit, 'but whose merits he hath foreknown, their rewards he hath predestinated.'" But nothing is more evident than that Ambrose is speaking of predestination to glory, which glory he calls by the name of rewards; and we grant, that this follows upon prescience of merits; that is, good works done from a principle of grace; but then the prescience of these arises from God's predestination to grace to enable men to perform them, and not predestination to grace from a prescience of merits; for then grace must be given according to merits; a doctrine never known by the ancients before the times of Pelagius.

In short, Ambrose's sense is this, and to which we agree, that those whose merits or good works God foreknew, because he had preordained, that they should walk in them, and as arising from that grace he determined to give them; these he predestinated unto glory, or prepared, rewards, of grace for them,

which he will certainly bestow on them. ENDNOTES:

[1] Dallaei Apolog. p. 799.

[2] De bono Persever. 50:2, c. 19.

[3] Ambros. in Luc. 9, p. 125.

[4] De Abraham, 50:2. c. 10, p. 265.

[5] In Luc. 2, p. 28.

[6] Eourrat. in Psalm 48, p. 824.

[7] In Psalm 43, p. 799. Vide p. 787.

[8] In Dominic. Septuages. p. 29.

[9] Epist. 50:5, epist. 37, p. 283.

[10] Hist. Pelag. 50:6, thes. 8, p. 543.

[11] Discourse, etc. p. 101; ed. 2. 100.

[12] Ambros. de fide, 50:5, c. 2, p. 190.

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