

Clemens Alexandrinus

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon on Clement of Alexandria explores the theological implications of predestination and election in early Christianity.

Scripture: Romans 8:29

Topics: "Election", "Predestination"

Description

John Gill discusses the teachings of Clement of Alexandria, emphasizing his views on predestination and the election of believers. Clement, who transitioned from a heathen philosopher to a Christian presbyter, articulated the doctrine of election, asserting that God predestines individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world. He highlights that the elect are a distinct group chosen by God, and that their understanding of scripture is divinely revealed. Gill notes that Clement's writings reflect a belief in God's sovereignty in salvation, while also acknowledging the complexities of free will in his philosophical background.

Transcript

The

CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH.

Part 4

Chapter 1--Of Predestination

Section 6--Clements Alexandrinus. A.D. 190.

Clement of Alexandria, of an heathen philosopher became a Christian, was a presbyter of the church at Alexandria, and, after Pantaenus, was master of the school in that place.[1] Several of his works are still extant, some of which were written a little after the death of Commodus the emperor, which, according to Clement[2] himself, was A.D. 194, but according to the vulgar æra, A.D. 192,[3] in which, 1. He clearly asserts the doctrine of election in many places, for he not only speaks of the people of God, under the character of elect; as when from a book called Pastor, the author of which was Hermas, and thought to be the same the apostle Paul makes mention of Romans 16:14, he says,[4] "that virtue which holds the church together is faith, by which oi eklektoi tou Qeou, "the elect of God are saved."

And in another place,[5] "the generation of them that seek him is, to genov to eklekton, "the elect nation." And elsewhere,[6] "not the place, but to aqroisma twn eklekton, "the congregation of the elect, I call the church." I say, he not only speaks often after this manner, but of them as a special, distinct number, predestinated and chosen of God, whom it is his will to save; accordingly he says,[7] "as his will is his work, and this is called the world, so his will is the salvation of men, kai touto ekklesia kekletai, "and this is called the church."

And again,[8] "If they also had known the truth, they would have all leaped into the way, ekloge de ouk an en, "and there would have been no election." And in another place,[9] "It is not convenient that all should understand, that is, the meaning of the scriptures, lest taking the things which are wholesomely said by the Holy Spirit, otherwise, they should prove hurtful; wherefore tois eklektois ton anthron, "to those that are chosen from among men," and to them that are through faith admitted to knowledge, the holy mysteries of the prophecies which are preserved are hid in parables."

And elsewhere,[10] "according to the fitness which every one has, He, that is, God, distributes his benefits both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; kai tois ek touton proorismenous, "and to them who are predestinated from among them, and are in his own time called, faithful, and elect." 2. It is evident that Clement held, that the predestination of men to everlasting life was from eternity, or before the world began, as appears from the following passages; having cited Jeremiah 1:5, 7, Do not say, I am a child; before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, etc., his note upon it is,[11] "this prophecy intimates unto us, tous pro kataboles kosmou eis pistin egnosmenous Theo, "that those who before the foundation of the world are known by God unto faith; that is, are appointed by him to faith, are now babes, because of the will of God lately fulfilled, as we are new-born unto vocation and salvation."

Yea, he says, that the Christians were before the world was; for speaking of several nations who boasted of antiquity, he observes,[12] that "none of them was before this world; but pro de tes tou kosmou kataboles emeis, "verily we were before the foundation of the world, who, that we ought to be, were first born in God;" we are the rational formations of God the Word, di on archaizomen, "by whom we have antiquity; for the Word was in the beginning;" which must be meant of their being chosen in Christ from everlasting.

And in another place,[13] "It is not becoming, that a friend of God, on proorisen o Theos pro kataboles kosmou eis ten akran egkatalegenai uiothesian, "whom God has predestinated before the foundation of the world, to be put into the high adoption of children, should fall into pleasures or fears, and be unemployed in repressing the passions." And elsewhere,[14] "what voice should he expect, who according to his purpose knows, ton eklekton kai pro tes geneseos, the elect even before his birth, and that which shall be, as though it was?"

To which I shall add one passage more, where he says,[15] that "such are gathered together by one Lord tous ede katatagmenous, ous proorisen o Theos dikaios esomenous pro kateboles kosmou egnokos, who are already ordained, whom God hath predestinated, knowing before the foundation of the world that they would be righteous." This passage is indeed referred to by Dr. Whitby,[16] in favor of a conditional, and against absolute predestination; but Clement might very well say, agreeable to the absolute scheme, that God predestinated men to glory, knowing they would be righteous; because he ordained them to be righteous, and determined to make them so.

He does not say, that he foreknew that they would be righteous of themselves, and therefore predestinated them to happiness, which only would serve the conditional scheme. Besides, neither he, nor any of the ancients, ever said, that God foreknowing men would be righteous, predestinated them to be so; but foreknowing they would be righteous, because he determined they should be, he predestinated them to happiness. There are two or three more passages of this writer referred to by Dr.

Whitby,[17] as opposing the doctrine of absolute election and reprobation, which, as has been before observed concerning some others, from Justin and Irenaeus, more properly belong to the doctrine of free will; and if Clement has said some things which look that way, it need not be much wondered at, since both he and his master Pantaenus had been addicted to the stoic philosophy; which they might find some difficulty to get clear of, and so might be mixed by them with the Christian scheme, as it is plain it too much was in the school of Alexandria. ENDNOTES:

[1] Hieron. Catal. Script. Eccl. s. 48.

[2] Stromat. l.1, p. 340.

[3] Vide Dallmi Apolog. part 4, p. 760.

[4] Stromat. 50:2, p. 384.

[5] Ibid. 50:7, p. 733.

[6] Ibid. p. 715.

[7] Praedagog. 50:1, c. 6, p. 93.

[8] Stromat. 50:4, p. 505.

[9] Ibid. 50:6, p. 677.

[10] Ibid. 50:7, p. 702, 703.

[11] Paedagog. 50:1, c. 7, p. 111.

[12] Admon. ad Gentes. p. 5.

[13] Stromat. 50:6, p. 652.

[14] Ibid. 50:7, p. 721.

[15] Ibid. p. 765.

[16] Discourse on the Five Points, p. 98; ed. 2. 97.

[17] Ibid. p. 96; ed. 2. 95.

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