

Gregorius Nazianzenus

by John Gill

The sermon explores Gregory Nazianzenus's teachings on predestination, divine grace, and the significance of being chosen by God in the context of early Christian theology.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "Predestination", "Divine Grace"

Description

John Gill discusses the teachings of Gregory Nazianzenus, emphasizing the doctrine of predestination and the divine grace necessary for belief and confession of faith. Gregory, a contemporary of Basil and a significant figure in early Christianity, asserts that true belief in God is a gift from Him, and he highlights the importance of a small number of faithful individuals over the multitude who deny God's deity. Gill notes Gregory's acknowledgment of a book of life and the concept of divine election, suggesting that God chooses certain individuals for salvation, regardless of their number. The sermon reflects on the significance of God's grace and the assurance of salvation for the elect, as well as the dangers of straying into heretical beliefs about the pre-existence of souls.

Transcript

The

CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH.

Part 4

Chapter 1--Of Predestination

Section 15--Gregorius Nazianzenus. A.D. 370.

Gregory, bishop of Nazianzum, in Cappadocia, commonly called the Divine, was son of a bishop, of the same name and place, a cotemporary with Basil, an intimate acquaintance of his, and preceptor to Jerome.[1] He died A.D. 389. Several of his writings still remain. Austin cites a passage from him in favor of the doctrine of predestination, as held and maintained by him; his words are these:[2] "To these two (meaning Cyprian and Ambrose) who ought to be esteemed sufficient, we may add a third, the holy Gregory; who testifies, that to believe in God, and to confess that we believe, is the gift of God; saying, we pray you confess the Trinity of one Deity; but if ye mean otherwise, say, that he is of one nature, and God will be deprecated, that a voice may be given you by the Holy Ghost; that is, God will be entreated to

permit that a voice may be given you, by which ye may be able to confess what ye believe; for I am sure he will give it.

He that hath given the first will also give the second; he that gives to believe will also give to confess." Upon which, and some other testimonies of the above-mentioned writers, Austin makes this remark: "Would any one say, that they so acknowledged the grace of God, as that they dared to deny his prescience; which not only the learned, but even the unlearned own? Besides, if they knew that God so gives these things, that they could not be ignorant, that he foreknew that he would give them, and could not but know to whom he would give them; procul dubio noverant praedestinationem; without doubt they were acquainted with predestination; which being preached by the apostles, we laboriously and diligently defend against the new heretics."

Gregory writes, indeed, very sparingly of this doctrine, and gives very few hints of it. The most considerable passage I have met with in him is the following;[3] "Three persons gathered together in the name of the Lord, are more esteemed of by God than multitudes that deny his Deity; would you prefer all the Canaanites to one Abraham? or the Sodomites to one Lot? or the Midianites to Moses, even to these sojourners and strangers? what, shall the three hundred men that lapped with Gideon, be inferior to the thousands that turned away? or Abraham's servants, though less in number, than the many kings and myriads of soldiers, whom they, though few, pursued and put to flight?"

How dost thou understand that passage, If the number of the children of Israel was as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved? as also that, I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal? It is not so, it is not, ουκ εν τοις πλειοσιν ευδοκουν ο Θεος, "God does not take pleasure in the multitude; thou numberest myriads, but God, tous sozomenous, those that are to be saved; thou the immeasurable dust; but I τα σκευη της εκλογης, the vessels of election."

From whence may be collected, as Gregory's judgment, that there were some persons who were chosen of God, and whom he resolved to save; that the number of them was with him, though that number was very small. In another place,[4] he speaks of a twofold book of life and of death; "Perhaps you have heard," says he, "τινα βιβλον ζωντων και βιβλον ον σοζομενον, of a certain book of the living, and of a book of them that are not to be saved, where we shall all be written, or rather are already written."

Though it must be owned, he adds κατ' αυξαν τον εδε βεβαιομενον εκαστος, "according to the desert of every one that have already lived." And in the same way he interprets Matthew 20:23, which he reads thus:[5] "To sit on my right hand and on my left, this is not mine to give, all οις δεδοται, but to whom IT IS GIVEN;" and goes on to ask, "Is the governing mind therefore nothing? is labor nothing? reason nothing? philosophy nothing? fasting nothing? watching nothing? lying on the ground, shedding fountains of tears, are these things nothing? αλλα κατα τινα αποκλυροσιν και Ιερημιασ αγιαξεται και αλλοι εκ μετρασ αλλοτριουνται, 'but by a kind of sortition was Jeremiah sanctified, and others rejected from the womb?'

I am afraid lest any absurd reasoning should enter, as if the soul lived elsewhere, and was afterwards bound to this body, and, according as it there behaved, some receive prophecy, and others who lived wickedly, are condemned; but to suppose this, is very absurd, and not agreeable to the faith of the church. Others may play with such doctrines; it is not safe for us. And concludes; "To those words, to whom it is given, add to this, who are worthy; who, that they may be such, have not only received of the Father, but have also given to themselves."

The notion he here militates against, is manifestly that of Origen's, of the pre-existence of souls, and their being adjudged according to their former conduct, either to happiness or misery; which Gregory was afraid some might be tempted to give into, and which, in order to guard against, led him into this gloss upon the text, and to make this addition to it. ENDNOTES:

[1] Hieron. Catal. Viror. Ecclesiastes sect. 127.

[2] Aug. de bono Persever. 50:2, c. 19.

[3] Greg. Nazianzen. Orat. 32, p 515, tom. i.

[4] Ibid. 9, p. 158.

[5] Ibid. 31, p. 505.

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