

# Irenaeus

by John Gill

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*John Gill's sermon on Irenaeus explores the themes of predestination, divine sovereignty, and the implications of human choices in the context of early Christian theology.*

**Scripture:** Romans 8:29

**Topics:** "Predestination", "Divine Sovereignty"

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## Description

John Gill discusses the teachings of Irenaeus, emphasizing his belief in God's predestination and the divine orchestration of all events for the benefit of His church. Irenaeus asserts that even the fall of man serves a purpose in God's plan, leading to the perfection of humanity and the manifestation of divine goodness. He highlights the preparation of eternal destinies based on God's foreknowledge, where those who seek the light are rewarded, while those who reject it face consequences. Gill notes Irenaeus's acknowledgment of a chosen number for eternal life and the immovability of God's election, illustrating the balance between divine sovereignty and human choice.

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## Transcript

The

CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH.

Part 4

Chapter 1--Of Predestination

Section 5--Irenaeus. A.D. 180.

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, and an auditor of Papias, who were both disciples of the apostle John; he was first a presbyter under Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, in France, and when he died, who suffered martyrdom[1] about A.D. 178, he succeeded him as bishop of that place, and became a martyr about[2] A.D. 198. He wrote five books against the heresies of the Valentinians and Gnostics, which remain to this day; from whence may be gathered his sense concerning the decrees of God.

And, 1. It is evident, that he believed that all things are predetermined by God, and are overruled by him for the good of his church and people; yea, that even the fall of man is used to their advantage; for he says,[3] that God has shown the greatness of his mind in the apostasy of man, for man is taught by it;" as

the prophet says "Thy backslidings shall reform thee." *Predefiniendo Deo omnia ad hominis perfectionem.* "God predetermining all things for the perfection of man, and for the bringing about and manifestation of his dispositions, that goodness may be shown, and righteousness perfected, and the church be conformed to the image of his Son, and at length become a perfect man, and by such things be made ripe to see God, and enjoy him." 2.

He asserts a preparation of happiness for some, and of punishment for others, upon the prescience or foreknowledge of God; his words are these:[4] *Deus autem omnia praesciens utrisque aptas praeparavit habitationes*, etc. "God foreknowing all things, has prepared for both suitable habitations;" for them who seek after the light of incorruptibility, and run unto it, he bountifully gives that light which they desire; but for others that despise it, and turn themselves from it, and avoid it, and as it were blinding their own selves, he hath prepared darkness fitting for such who are against the light, and for those who shun being subject to it, he has "provided proper punishment."

It is true, he puts this upon the prescience of God, foreknowing the different characters and actions of men; and therefore Vossius,[5] and Dr. Whitby,[6] from him, have produced this passage, with others, to prove, that the fathers before Austin held, that God predestinated men to live from a prescience that they would live piously; but I think it may very well be understood, in a sense entirely consistent with the doctrine of predestination, as maintained by us; for we readily own, that God foreknew who would live piously, and seek after the light of life, because he determined to give them that grace which should enable them so to do, and therefore prepared mansions of light and glory for them; and, to use Irenaeus's own phrase, *benigne donans*, of his own grace and goodness liberally and bountifully gives that light unto them which they desire, and he has prepared for them.

On the other hand, he foreknew who would despise, and shun the light, and blind themselves yet more and more; because he determined to leave them to themselves, to their native blindness, darkness, and ignorance, which they love; and accordingly prepared regions of darkness, as a proper punishment for them. For, 3. He speaks of a certain number of persons chosen to eternal life, and of God's giving up others to, and leaving them in their unbelief, in much such language as we usually do.

Treating of the doctrine of the resurrection, he has these words,[7] "God is not so poor and indigent as not to give to every body its own soul as its proper form. Hence *plerothentos ton arithmou ou autos par auto proorise, pantes oi engrapheetes eis zoen anastesontai*, having completed the number which he before determined with himself, all those who are written, or ordained unto life, shall rise again, having their own bodies, souls, and spirits, in which they pleased God; but those who are deserving of punishment shall go into it, having also their own souls and bodies in which they departed from the grace of God."

And in another place,[8] having cited several passages of Scripture which respect the blinding and hardening of the heart of Pharaoh, and others, such as Isaiah 6:9, 10, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Romans 1:28, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12, which are commonly made use of in handling the doctrine of reprobation, he thus descants upon them, "If therefore now, as many as God knows, will not believe, since he foreknows all things, *tradidit eos infidelitati eorum*, he hath given them up to their infidelity, "and turns his face from them," *relinquens eos in tenebris*, "leaving them in the darkness which they have chosen for themselves;" is it to be wondered at, that he then "gave up Pharaoh, who would never believe, with them that were with him, to their own infidelity?"

And elsewhere,[9] having mentioned the words in Romans 9:10-12, so frequently urged in this controversy, he has this observation upon them, "from hence it is manifest, that not only the prophecies of the patriarchs, but the birth of Rebecca, was a prophecy of two people, one greater, the other less; one in bondage, the other free; of one and the same father; one and the same God is ours and theirs, who understands things hidden; qui scit omnia antequam fiant, 'who knows all things before they come to pass,' and therefore hath said, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." 4.

Eternal predestination, or predestination before time, before men have a being, was not unknown to this ancient writer; for in one place he says,[10] "being predestinated indeed according to the knowledge of the Father; ut essemus qui nondum eramus, that we might be, who as yet were not, made, or were the beginning of his creation." And not to take any further notice than barely to mention his reading the text in Romans 1:1, Predestinated to the Gospel of God;[11] and which after him is so rendered by Origen, Chrysostom, and Theophylact, who understand it not of the vocation of Paul to the apostleship, but of his eternal election, and the pre-ordination of him of old, before he was born. 5.

He plainly hints at the stability and immovableness of the decree of election, when he calls it, *turris electionis*, "the tower of election;" for why should he call it a tower, but because it is impregnable and immoveable, because "the purpose of God, according to election, is that foundation which stands sure, not of works, but of him that calleth?" For having taken notice of some passages of the prophets, he thus says,[12] "These things the prophets declaring required the fruit of righteousness, but the people not believing, at last he sent his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: whom, when the wicked husbandmen had killed, they cast out of the vineyard; wherefore the Lord God hath delivered it to other husbandmen, who render him the fruits in their seasons; not now walled about, but spread throughout the whole world; *turre electionis exaltata ubique et speciosa*, "the tower of election being every where exalted and glorious."

That is, if I understand him right, the election obtained every where, or electing grace took place, not in Judea only, as heretofore, but in all the nations of the world; for it follows, "every where the church is famous, every where a winepress is dug, and every where there are some that receive the Spirit." There are two passages cited from Irenaeus by Dr. Whitby,[13] as militating against the doctrines of absolute election and reprobation, but both of them respect the doctrine of free will; and it must be owned, that there are some things dropped by this writer, which, upon first reading them, seem to favor that doctrine, and will be considered in their proper place. ENDNOTES:

[1] Vide Fabricii Bibl. Graec. 50:5, c. 1, p. 66.

[2] Vide Dallaei. Apol. par. 4. p. 759.

[3] Irenaeus adv. Haeres. 50:4, c. 72, p. 419.

[4] Irenaeus adv. Haeres. 50:4, c. 76, p. 423.

[5] Hist. Pelag. 50:6; Thess. 8, p. 542.

[6] Discourse on the Five Points, p. 101; ed. 2. 100.

[7] L. 2, c. 62, inter Fragment. Graec. ad. calcem.

[8] L. 4, c. 48, p. 389.

[9] L. 4, c. 38, p. 376.

[10] L. 5, c. 1, p. 432.

[11] L. 3, c. 18, p. 276.

[12] L. 4, c. 70, p. 412.

[13] Discourse on the Five Points, p. 96; ed. 2. 95.

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