

# Minutius Felix

by John Gill

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*The sermon argues that the doctrine of predestination was held by early Christians, and that it is not inconsistent with the idea of God's justice.*

**Scripture:** Romans 9:14, Ephesians 1:4

**Topics:** "Divine Election", "Predestination"

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## Description

John Gill discusses the dialogue of Minutius Felix, emphasizing the early Christian understanding of predestination and the concept of election. He highlights the objections raised by Caecilius, a heathen, regarding the perceived injustice of God in punishing individuals based on fate rather than free will. Gill explains that the early Christians believed in a doctrine of predestination that aligned with God's foreknowledge and grace, asserting that conversion to Christianity was not by free will but through divine election. He also addresses the historical context of these beliefs and their implications for understanding God's justice and mercy. Ultimately, Gill defends the notion that God's decrees are just and rooted in His omniscience.

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## Transcript

The

CAUSE OF GOD AND TRUTH.

Part 4

Chapter 1--Of Predestination

Section 4--Minutius Felix. A.D. 170.

Minutius Felix was a famous counselor at Rome; according to Monster Daille,[1] he was contemporary with Fronto the orator who lived in the times of Antoninus Pius, which emperor died A.D. 161, and, following him, I have placed him in the year as above; though by others he is commonly put at the beginning of the third century. He wrote a dialogue between Caecilius a heathen, and Octavius a Christian, which is entitled Octavius, and is still in being. In this dialogue Caecilius the heathen objects to the Christians, thus,[2] *Nam quicquid agimus, ut alii fato, ita vos Deo addicitis; sic sectae vestrae non spontaneos cupere sed electos.*

Igitur iniquam judicem fingitis, qui sortem in hominibus puniat, non voluntatem; that is, "Whatsoever we do, as others ascribe it to fate, so you to God; and so men desire your sect not of their own accord, but as elect; wherefore you suppose an unjust judge, who punishes in men lot or fortune, and not the will." To this Octavius replies,[3] Nec de fato quisquam aut solatium captet aut excuset eventum. Sit fortis (sortis, Ed. Oxon. 1662) fortunae, mens tamen libera est et ideo actus hominis, non dignitas judicatur.

Quid enim aliud est fatum, quam quod de unoquoque Deus fatus est? Qui cum possit praescire materiam, pro meritis et qualitatibus singulorum etiam fata determinat, ita in nobis non genitura plectitur, sed ingenii natura punitur; that is, "No man may either take any comfort from fate, or excuse an event; for let it be of lot or fortune, yet the mind is free, and therefore the act and not the worth of the man is judged of. For what else is fate, but what God says of every one of us?"

Who, since he can foreknow matter, even determines the fates according to the merits and qualities of every one; so that not our nativity (that is, as depending on the position of the stars) but our natural disposition is punished." From whence I observe, 1. That there was a doctrine held by the Christians in those times, which seemed to have some affinity with, and to bear some likeness to, the stoical fate, or Caecilius could not have thus objected with any face; nor does this objection appear to be altogether groundless, as many of his certainly were, since Octavius, in his reply, does not deny the doctrine of fate rightly understood, though he would not have men shelter themselves under it, and excuse their actions on the account of it; nay, he does not reject the use of that word, but explains it in a Christian sense, saying, "What is fate, but what God says, or determines, concerning every one of us?"

Now no doctrine, but that of predestination, as held by such who are called Calvinists, can be thought to bear any likeness to the doctrine of fate, or be liable to the like objections; wherefore it is, reasonable to conclude, that the same doctrine was generally taught and received by the Christians then as it is by them that hold it now, since the same charge is brought against it. 2. That the saints in those times went under the name of the elect; and that it was a current opinion among them, that men were converted to the Christian religion, and were brought into fellowship and society with the Christians, not by the power of their own free will, but in consequence of electing grace; and therefore Caecilius upbraids them as coveting the Christian sect, and joining themselves to it, non spontaneos, "not of their own accord," sed electos, "but being the elect." 3.

What farther confirms this, that the doctrine of predestination was then received among the Christians, is, that Caecilius goes on to charge the Christian hypothesis with making God unjust; since he must punish men not for what they voluntarily do, but for what they cannot help, for that which is allotted and determined for them to do; which contains the whole strength of what is now objected to the doctrine of absolute reprobation, and what it was of old charged with, even in the apostles' times, What shall we say then?

Is there unrighteousness with God? (Rom. 9:14.) 4. The latter part of Octavius's reply is indeed produced by the Arminians, as militating against the absolute decrees of God; but without any just reason, since there is nothing in it that is inconsistent with them. We readily own that God can and does foreknow whatever is or shall be; and that according to the qualities of men, he determines their fates, the issues of things, their salvation or damnation, for we say, that "God decreed to damn no man but for sin; and that he appointed none to salvation but through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth;" or in other words, that God foreknowing the faith and repentance of his elect, because he had determined to give them to them, he appoints them to salvation, through them as means; and foreknowing the sin, final

impenitence, and unbelief of the rest, he appoints them to damnation; though these things are to be considered not as causes of predestination, quoad actum volentis, with respect to the will of God; but quoad res volitas, with respect to the things willed.

Dr. Twisse, who well understood this controversy, and was an able defender of the absolute decrees of God, agrees with every thing that Octavius here says: "As to that of Minutius Felix," says he,[4] "we deny that God doth sortem in hominibus punire, non voluntatem. We do not say, genitura plectitur; we say, that in every one who is punished by God, igenii natura punitur; we confess, that fatum illud est, quod de unoquoque Deus fatus est; and that promeritis el singulorum qualitatibus etiam fata determinat." ENDNOTES:

[1] Apol. part 4, p. 756.

[2] Min. Felix. Octav. p. 363, ad Calcem Arnobii, p. 11, ed. Oxon. 1662.

[3] Min. Felix. Octav. p. 397. Ed. Elmenhorst. p. 39; ed. Oxon.

[4] Riches of God's Grace, against Hord. part 1, p. 54.

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