

Praise Alone

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In the 16th century Germany there was a Catholic priest named Martin Luther. He was a priest, but was not convinced of his own salvation. He struggled to search for the truth. When he encountered the living God through the words in the Bible, his eyes were opened to the most fundamental truth, “Salvation is by faith.” He was so exultant to know the salvation of Christ that he later used such an expression as, “Salvation is only by faith.”

However, those who did not like the Reformation brought about by Luther grumbled saying, “He claims to value the Bible, yet he added a word ‘only’ not written in the Bible.”

How blind they were! It does not matter how exactly words were extracted from the Bible. What the Bible reveals is the very grace of Christ which could only be emphasized by the expression, “Salvation is only by faith.”

Why are many Christians so particular about the letter that they are blind to the reality – the heart of the scriptures? It was the confession of Luther’s faith that he emphasized “only by faith.” By all means he wanted to express his joy of salvation, even adding the word “only.”

The time changed, and when Christians who espouse Protestantism of Luther hear the words, “praise alone,” they say, “It is suspicious. It is not written in the Bible that praise alone is sufficient. We need a pastor, elders, teaching, prayers and services to protect the sound faith. Praise alone is definitely not acceptable.”

They have no ears to hear nor heart to understand what the faith in praise truly means. They think praise to be merely singing hymns. “Everything is completed in praise” is our faith in Christ. It is an expression of our most profound exultation of encountering Christ, just as Luther said “only by faith.”

Praise is the worship. We are to worship the Lord God in spirit and truth. We do not have to sing aloud to praise the Lord. Those who worship the Lord are praising Him. Our praise is what God desires the most. Bible studies, prayers, ministry and all other works are for us to praise the Lord. When we praise the Lord, all those things make perfect sense. In fact, I often hear people say that the Bible became clearer once they understood the faith in praise. I myself is one of them.

For many Christians the Bible is something to learn from pastors or great teachers. Luther who proclaimed “only by faith” also advocated “the Bible alone.” He claimed that anyone could gain understanding of the Bible directly from God, not from priests or specialists. He believed that everybody who believes in Christ is a priest, and that God directly speaks to them. His faith became the foundation of Protestantism, but the very Protestants began to speak out that it is dangerous to read the Bible without the teachings of pastors or teachers. They say so because so-called priests and pastors teach them so. Such priests and pastors want to preserve their authority over them. The same Protestants who denounced the authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church as the fleshly ambitions are this time striving to guard exactly the same thing that their

pioneers had protested against!

For them “only by faith” and “the Bible alone” are no longer their hearts’ confession, but became their intellectual understanding losing life. So when hearing, “Everything is completed in praise,” they can only interpret it as a way of faith and cannot see that praise itself is the faith in Christ.

“Praise alone” does not mean that we only sing songs. It means that the faith is nothing but praise to Christ. Therefore, we believe that everything is completed in praise. Praise is not something to be placed in parallel with teachings, prayers, Bible studies and other things, but praise itself is our faith in Christ. When we have such faith as the foundation, everything built upon it, such as prayers and the Bible studies, comes to have meanings. The concept is not parallel structured but three-dimensional.

Praise to Christ is not a means to receive the grace of God, but our faith itself. When we worship the Lord God in spirit and truth, we witness that miracles and healings happen and people are saved as a result. However, we do not praise the Lord only because we can receive those benefits.

“Everything is completed in praise” is not just an idea that we can receive healing as a reward if we praise the Lord. It is to worship and entrust everything to the One who dwells in the midst of our praise and rules and controls everything in His own way. We are not to assert our own desires. It does not matter whether we will receive a reward or not. We simply praise Him in spirit and truth, because praise is not a means but our very faith in Christ.

Everything that happens in life and every event on the earth have been absorbed into the cross of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Joy and sorrow, light and darkness are all pointing to one place, that is, the cross of Christ. When going through the cross, everything turns into the resurrected life. Therefore, the entire universe raises the sound of praise to the cross. What the cross emits is God's mystery which surpasses our human understandings.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

(Romans 11:36)

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