

From the Desk of Father George Kuforiji

Is it by Faith Alone? Part I

When Martin Luther came up with his theology of salvation, he claimed that it is by the grace of God and “faith alone” that we are saved. He arrived at his doctrine by studying Romans chapters 3 and 4. Calvin, also by studying Romans 9-11, came up with his doctrine of predestination.

The first question we need to consider is, when did Paul come into the picture as being an apostle? We know he persecuted the Church before his conversion. This was a period of about 4 years after the Ascension of Jesus Christ. That implies that during the period before his conversion the apostles had been teaching orally the Gospels. Though the Epistles, or letters of St. Paul, were written first, what was being taught orally by the apostles would be the doctrines that we find mainly in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and all the other letters.

We know that three years following his initial revelation from God, Paul’s mission was to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. He went to Jerusalem to meet Cephas. Cephas is the Aramaic name for “rock,” which means Peter. He wrote that he remained with Cephas for fifteen days. I am sure they were not talking about which tea was better to drink. My best guess is they were talking mostly about Scripture, especially about the Gospel of Jesus. He wrote that he also met James the “brother” of Jesus. Paul went back again to see James, Peter, and John. “Then after fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. I went up in accord with a revelation, and I presented to them the gospel that I preach to the Gentiles (but privately to those of repute) so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain (Galatians 2:1-2).”

Obviously from the phrase “so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain,” Paul wanted to make sure that his doctrines did not contradict the teachings the apostles received from Jesus and which they preached and later were recorded by the evangelists. If there was a problem with his teachings, Paul would have let us know because he was a man of high integrity who was a straight shooter. The only comment we heard came from Peter who said, “And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, also wrote to you, speaking of these things as he does in all his letters. In them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures. Therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, be on your guard not to be led into the error of the unprincipled and to fall from your own stability (2 Peter 3:15-17).”

So there were no contradictions between the doctrines of the apostles and Paul’s. The only problem had to do with interpretation, which according to Peter could be distorted just as other scriptures could be misinterpreted to the destruction of those who do so. When you consider Luther’s “faith alone,” you will find out that it contradicts all the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels about final judgment which determines our salvation. That was why he wanted to remove from the canon of the Bible the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and also the letter of James.

A few passages in the Gospels that contradict Luther’s teaching are:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, ... And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me...’ ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least

brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me (Matt 25:32-45)."

In John 14:21, Jesus did not say, "Whoever has my commandments and has faith alone is the one who loves me." This is the correct quote: "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him (John 14:21)." This passage refers to some of the "corporal works of mercy." Consequently, Martin Luther's interpretation of scripture, especially Romans 3:28 where he inserted "faith alone" is a "strange teaching" that is not part of the Good News passed on by Jesus to His apostles. The phrase "faith alone" occurs in the New Testament one time, in James 2:24. There the inspired apostle declares that justification is not from faith alone. Instead he said, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." Luther's teaching must be the problem and not Paul's teaching on grace, faith, works, justification, and our salvation.

We pray and hope that some day our Protestant brothers and sisters will come home to the true faith.