

THE SOLA'S OF THE REFORMATION

v. God's Glory Alone

1 Kings 8:56-61, Romans 11:33-36

Faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone and Scripture alone are an apt description of Reformation teaching and belief, which reach a climax and summation in God's glory alone, Soli Deo Gloria.

The glory of God defies simple explanation. Glory describes the essential nature of God. At best we can seek to use human language by way of analogy to grasp its meaning. Old Testament Hebrew speaks of God's glory as 'weight' or 'heaviness' in an attempt to describe God's visible and active presence by way of creation and covenant. In creation the heavens declare the glory of God. In covenant relation with his people a burning bush, a pillar of cloud and fire and the 'shekinah glory' filling the tabernacle and temple are material manifestations of God's glory. When Moses requested to see God's glory in Exodus 33 he was granted a rear view of comet-like afterburn flashing past him. In short, the glory of God in the O.T. defies adequate description.

The New Testament word for glory (doxa) is derived from the Greek term for opinion, reputation or praise. Luke describes God's glory as dazzling light (Luke 2:9) which elicits praise from the angelic host, "glory to God in highest" (v14) and terror on the part of the shepherds (v9). Unlike the material manifestation of the Old Testament, God's glory in the New Testament is supremely revealed in the person of Jesus "Veiled in flesh the God head see" Charles Wesley's great carol puts it. God's glory (doxa) of necessity leads to doxology (praise).

The doxology of Paul in Romans 11:33-36 is a case in point. The attributes of God are beyond comprehension, eliciting three rhetorical questions: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (v34a) in response to the knowledge of God (v33a), "Who has been his councillor?" (v34b) in response to the wisdom of God (v33a), "Who has ever given to God that God should repay them?" (v35) in response to his riches (v33a).

Paul thereupon quotes from the writings of the Stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius in v36a, "for from him and through him and for him are all things" as if to underscore that all truth is God's truth and his glory all-embracing. The composer Johan Sebastian Bach, having reached an impasse in his musical career, prayed "Jesus help me show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people". Thereafter at the end of each folio of music he wrote SDG (Soli Deo Gloria).

We may not have the musical genius of Bach. Nevertheless, may his example inspire us to yield our gifts and abilities, no matter how small or insignificant, to the glory of God. In so doing we can echo the words of Paul "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor 3:5).

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