
Covenant Reformed News

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What Is a Protestant? (3)

As well as the truth that the Bible alone is the Word of God (*sola Scriptura*), Protestants believe in Christ alone (*solus Christus*).

The Lord Jesus is both fully God and fully man in one divine Person. He is the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, incarnate. As Christ, He is God's anointed One as promised in the Old Testament. As Jesus, He is the only and complete Saviour. As Lord, He the sovereign governor of all.

We Protestants believe Christ's virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, glorious ascension and almighty rule at God's right hand.

On the cross, our Lord died for all the sins of all His elect people. All our iniquities were "laid on," imputed or reckoned to Him (Isa. 53:6) and He bore the punishment for them that was due to us. As our only high priest, He continually prays for us, for "he ever liveth to make intercession for" us (Heb. 7:25).

In order for God to save sinners, Christ's cross and intercession are absolutely necessary. It is entirely sufficient for all our salvation. We do not need the pope, earthly priests, Mary or the saints to bring us to God (John 14:6; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19-22).

The battle of Protestantism with Rome (and others) is essentially the same as that in Acts 4 between the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders and the apostles, who declared concerning Christ, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (11-12).

Scripture alone teaches salvation in Christ alone by faith alone (*sola fide*). Protestantism proclaims that our salvation and perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ is received solely by faith. The forgiveness of sins in Christ's blood and the imputed righteousness of God (the lifelong and perfect obedience of Jesus) is ours by believing—only by believing! Our justification and legal standing before God, therefore, does not need any supplementation by the works of the the saints, the Lord's earthly mother, the church or ourselves.

This biblical and Protestant truth is just as necessary today over against Rome as it was in the sixteenth century. Sadly, *sola fide* is also crucial against much of modern day evangelicalism. Some of those who speak of justification by faith alone actually mean justification by *man's free will* alone! They teach that the sinner's salvation is determined by the decision of his own supposed free will, contrary to the truth of God's Word (Rom. 3:11; 7:18; 8:7) and the united testimony of the Reformation, including Martin Luther's great Protestant manifesto, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525).

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Sola fide is vital for the comfort and vitality of the Christian every day. Being justified by faith alone, we have "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1) and blessedness (4:6-9; Ps. 32:1-2)!

To go further, Scripture alone teaches salvation in Christ alone by faith alone through grace alone (*sola gratia*). Our salvation is a divine gift, an entirely gratuitous or gracious gift, according to the sovereign favour of our merciful God in Jesus Christ, for we were "chosen ... in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

Grace alone, both in time (by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ) and in eternity (in election)—this is Protestantism, because this is the teaching of God's Word: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). "So then it is not of him that willeth [so much for man's free will!], nor of him that runneth [i.e., the exertion of man's works], but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

The fifth of the Five Solas is the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*). The glory is not man's (even in the tiniest part), whether by his supposed free will or his good works, for all that is truly good in the believer's works is entirely by God's grace (John 15:5; Eph. 2:10). The glory is not even partially the church's, especially not the false church of Rome nor any other false or departing church.

Salvation is wholly of the Father, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the glory is alone due to the Triune God: the electing Father, the atoning Son and the calling Spirit. *Soli Deo gloria* is the message of the Reformation, for "our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3)!

Philip Schaff, the church historian, sums it up well: "Romanism puts the Church first and Christ next; Protestantism reverses the order. Romanism says, Where the Church is (meaning thereby the papal organization), there is Christ; Protestantism says, Where Christ is, there is the Church. Romanism says, Where the Catholic tradition is, there is the Bible and the infallible rule of faith; Protestantism says, Where the Bible is, there is the true tradition and the infallible rule of faith. Romanism says, Where good works are, there are faith and justification; Protestantism says, Where faith is, there are justification and good works. Romanism throws Mary and the saints between Christ and the believer; Protestantism goes directly to the Saviour. Romanism proceeds from the visible Church (the papacy) to the invisible Church; Protestantism from the invisible Church (the true body of Christ) to the visible ... Protestantism is a protest against the tyranny of man on the basis of the authority of God. It proclaims the Bible to be the only infallible rule of Christian faith and practice, and teaches justification by grace alone, as apprehended by a living faith. It holds up Christ as all in all, whose word is all-sufficient to teach, whose grace is all-sufficient to save."

Rev. Stewart

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Lord's Day services at 11 am & 6 pm

Website: www.cprc.co.uk • Live broadcast: www.cprf.co.uk/live

Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC

— Saul’s Prophecy, Solomon’s Wives and Hell’s Torments —

I am going to answer three unrelated questions in this issue of the *News*.

Question 1: “I Samuel 18:10 states that Saul prophesied when the ‘evil spirit’ came upon him (cf. I Sam. 10:9-13; 19:23-24; John 11:51). How do we explain this?”

In the old dispensation, those who were office-bearers (especially prophets, priests and kings) were given the Holy Spirit to equip them for their work. Through the Spirit, they were enabled to prophesy, make sacrifices or rule God’s people. They were thus designated by God to be His appointed servants.

Such men were not always true believers; some, though anointed, were evil men. Such was Caiaphas who prophesied that Jesus would “die for the people” (John 11:50). Caiaphas, interestingly, did not intend what the prophecy meant in God’s purpose (51-52), but we are told that he prophesied because he was high priest that year, that is, an office-bearer in Israel, though a wicked one (51).

There were downright wicked men who also prophesied, as, for example, the prophets who falsely assured Ahab that he would gain the victory over the Syrians (II Chron. 18:5). It is possible that men prophesy by means of Satan or some demon in their hearts. After all, Satan frequently imitates the work of God as best he can to claim that he has the same power as Jehovah. Verses 19-22 clearly show that a demon *did* make the prophets of Ahab prophesy. It is because of false prophets in the nation that God told Israel how to distinguish between true prophets and counterfeits (Deut. 13:1-11).

In the new dispensation, God pours out His Spirit on all flesh, that is, on all His people to form a universal church gathered from all nations, tribes and tongues. Sometimes men who hold offices in the church are evil men whose sin is all the greater because they sin as office-bearers. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ who is the great Prophet of God. As God’s prophets in a wicked world, we must hold forth the truth of His written Word.

Question 2: “Solomon’s first wife, it seems, was a pagan (I Kings 3:1). Was he not transgressing in this thing (Gen. 28:1; Ex. 33:16; Deut. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7:39)? Yet shortly thereafter God appears to him in a dream to bless him (I Kings 3:5-15)?”

I see no proof in Scripture that the daughter of Pharaoh was Solomon’s *first* wife (I Kings 3:1). We read in I Kings 14:31 that the mother of Rehoboam (and, therefore, Solomon’s wife) was Naamah the Ammonitess. She may well have been Solomon’s first wife, because it was not uncommon for a king to anoint his firstborn son to be his successor. This practice fitted with the general rule in Israel that the firstborn received the birthright. Whether or not this Ammonitess was a godly woman we are not told. We may speculate that, if she was Solomon’s first wife, she may have been a believer. But we are building a house of cards, all based on guesses concerning things God has seen fit not to tell us. We are in danger of drawing a wrong conclusion, if we do that.

I Kings 11 seems to me to offer the clue we need (1). Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (3). Kings in those days frequently married daughters of other kings to seal a treaty of peace between their two nations. Solomon probably followed the

same practice. Kings of great power and wealth also made polygamy a practice because it displayed the king’s wealth. After all, to support 1,000 wives takes a lot of money.

While polygamy itself was not directly condemned by God in the old dispensation, marrying foreign woman surely was (2). The result of Solomon’s sin in marrying foreign wives was that he also fell into the terrible sin of idolatry (3-8). The Lord punished Solomon for this sin and took away 10 tribes from his son, Rehoboam (9-13).

While we do not read in the historical narratives that Solomon turned from his sin, his repentance is recorded in his book of Ecclesiastes. In light of the fact that this book is Solomon’s confession, there is a certain pathos in his concluding words. After showing the vanity of everything of this world, Solomon says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc. 12:13). Solomon must have written this with a sorrowful heart and a deep sigh of regret, looking back over the 40 years of his reign.

Question 3: “What are the different torments people in hell are going through? And what is the difference between hell now and after the final judgment?”

Just as God gives His people a reward and place in heaven that is commensurate with the good works they do by His grace, so He assigns a place in hell that is commensurate with the unbeliever’s sins (Luke 12:47-48). The actual heinousness of their iniquities is determined by God in connection with their position in life. For example, a man who murders thousands and millions (as Hitler and Stalin did) receives a greater punishment than the man who killed only one person. A man who confessed the truth, and then abandoned and blasphemed it, endures greater suffering than a man who never heard the gospel (47-48). Thus there are degrees in hell, just as there are degrees of blessedness in heaven (though every saint is fully and completely blessed).

The torments of hell include bearing God’s wrath. God’s wrath is a terrible thing, for it is to live apart from Him in total abandonment. It is to know one’s sins in the light of Jehovah’s holiness and thus to see one’s awful rebellion against Him. The torments of hell include existing with those whom the people in hell have sinned against. It includes mothers hearing the accusing cries of their unborn babies, whom they killed. It is to see every moment the anguish of one’s family whom one abused and abandoned.

The torments of hell include great suffering that cannot be compared with any anguish in this life. It is to face such an existence forever: without end—forever and ever. No light at the end of the tunnel. No lessening of the pain—ever. No escape from the torturous cries of those whom one defrauded or cheated or slandered—forever!

The suffering of “the lake of fire” after the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) will be similar to the suffering of hell before the last day. The Bible gives us little information on this, except to remind us that it will be suffering of soul *and* body, and not of the soul alone, when the bodies of the wicked are also raised from the dead. Some “evangelicals” deny hell but their denial of it will only make its reality more terrible when they suffer it.

Thanks be to God who sovereignly, without any contribution of good on our part, saves us from the hell we deserve by His amazing grace in Christ crucified! *Prof. Hanko*