

“Protestantism”

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Introduction:

1. Many are Protestants who could not tell you what a Protestant is nor why they themselves are Protestants.

a. Of course, the term protestant arose out of the period of the Reformation and were made up of those people who protested against the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, the term is still used to distinguish between those who belong to the Roman Catholic Church and those who belong to one of the other denominations.

b. However, the term describes persons who have some fundamental beliefs and who subscribe to certain patterns of action and government.

c. It seems to me that it is becoming more and more essential for those of us here in America to understand the underlying principles which govern Protestantism and to know why we are Protestants.

I. Let us try and see first what a Protestant is

1. Someone has said that when you see two persons discussing a matter and are in disagreement that most surely one or the other of them is a Protestant.

2. The very best definition of a Protestant may be that they are individuals. Some are more rugged in their individualism than others, but all are individualists, especially in regard to their religious life and belief.

3. They take the position that they have a right to believe what they please.

a. They contend that no government or state has a right to demand them to have any particular religious belief or hold to any particular form of worship.

b. Indeed they hold that one of the fundamental reasons for the existence of any government, whatever form it may hold, is to guarantee to them this fundamental right of religious liberty.

1. This is at the foundation of much of the Constitution of these United States. It was built upon the conception of the entire separation of Church and State.

2. The State has no right to control the Church and the Church has no right to dictate to the State. We have always held that it is unconstitutional to tax a man to support any particular church or to tax him to support all the churches. Today we need to be careful that we are not seeing violated before our very eyes this fundamental and, I believe, important tenet of our Constitution. For our present government is using or permitting the use of our tax money to support certain denominational hospitals and schools. That is one of the reasons I say we need to understand aright the meaning and position of Protestants. We must surely be on our guard that we shall not find in the future that this principle of Protestantism has been

violated to such an extent that we have seen the breakdown to a marked degree of this conception of entire separation of Church and State. I believe that would be a very deplorable thing to happen to our land and our nation.

4. But a Protestant holds just as strongly to the position that no ecclesiastical authority of whatever church has any right to force them to subscribe to any set form of beliefs or practices contrary to their conscience.

a. That does not mean that a church does not have a right to set forth certain religious beliefs and demand that all who belong to that denomination shall subscribe to those doctrines; but that any man has the right to refuse and to go unite with some other denomination is the belief of true Protestantism.

b. Here is the danger of the so-called Ecumenical Movement which would have all denominations united into one great body.

1. They would say to us that it does not matter what one believes, that there would be no emphasis upon beliefs – each man could believe what he pleases. That sounds very broadminded and tolerant. But the trouble is that it is too broadminded and tolerant. Because a church which has no doctrinal basis and no fundamental essential beliefs will have no keel to steady it in time of storm. We would raise up a group of people who would belong to a moral, ethical or economic organization, who had not been grounded in any great beliefs about God and the things of God. A Church cannot be a Church unless it has some beliefs. One might as well belong to a club or fraternal organization.

2. Soon there would be practiced a very general set form of worship. Anyone who objected to this form of worship would have no place to go and his protests would fall on deaf ears.

3. A man asked me once if I did not believe there should only be one Church. Being a Protestant, I answered, “No” – that he preferred to worship in one manner and I preferred to worship in another – that I felt we could both worship God truly and honestly, he in his way and I in mind. Just so long as we have the spirit of Protestants, then we should within reasonable bounds provide for each man to belong to the Church through which he can best express his belief in God and worship God in the manner that calls forth from him the greatest adoration and praise.

4. So a Protestant is one who believes in and declares his right to believe what he pleases, of course, guided by his authority, and to worship God as he pleases without any government or church demanding he should do it in their particular way.

II. What do Protestants believe, is another essential question

1. A real Protestant, a Christian Protestant, believes in the authority of the Scriptures.

a. The Roman Catholic Church does not do this. They believe that the Church is the final authority and that the Church has the right to say what man must believe and how he should conduct himself under all circumstances.

b. But the Protestant declares the Scriptures are his final authority.
c. Let me call your attention to the fact that a Protestant is not at liberty to believe just what he wishes nor to act just as he pleases. He simply declares that no one but God has any authority over his beliefs and religious actions. But one of the fundamental beliefs of Protestants is that the Scriptures are a revelation of God and that, therefore, he is bound by them. He may disagree with others in their interpretation, but a Christian Protestant does not deny that he is bound by conscience to read and study them and then to believe what he finds they teach and to conduct himself according to their teaching.

1. It is my humble opinion that the great weakness of Protestantism today is that we have declared our freedom from God's revelation, to act and believe as we please. We are not free to believe as we please nor to act as we desire. We, if true Protestants, are under compulsion to believe that we think the Bible teaches and to act according to its instructions. But far too many Protestants never read the Bible nor study it and have no sense of obligation to do so. They simply assert their freedom to belief and actions without any regard to the authority of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

2. The second fundamental belief of Protestantism is that they are saved by faith in Christ as Savior.

a. We believe that God sent His Son in the world to die for our sins and that when God did that He accomplished all that was necessary for our salvation.

b. We do not believe that any man or group of men, any church or group of churches, hold within themselves nor under the jurisdiction of God the power to either permit us to enter heaven or exclude us from it.

c. The Roman Catholic Church holds just as strongly as Protestants that salvation is by Christ but they add to that the belief that they hold as a church the dispensing of this grace of God to whom they will and the withholding of it from whom they will. They hold that certain merits must be added to this work of Christ and that they as a church hold these merits and can dispense them.

d. We Protestants protest this and declare that God is our only judge and that we stand or fall as He will.

e. We believe that Christ did all that was necessary for our salvation and that nothing any man can do for us can in any manner whatever add to His work for us.

f. We are saved by God's mercy through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

g. Here again we Protestants must be careful that we do not declare our freedom from God in believing that we can set up our own plan of salvation and ignore the plain teachings of the Word of God.

3. The third fundamental belief of Protestants is that each individual Christian stands before God in the same manner.

a. We do not believe that any person has a place before God except through Christ

and what He has done for them and that what He has done for one who believes in Him, He has done for all who believe in Him.

b. One may be an ordained minister and another just a child but all have the same right in the presence of God and that privilege comes through Christ and Christ alone as the one and only Mediator. That has some practical applications which I would like to take a minute to point out to you.

1. A man dying on the battlefield, for instance, can himself come into the presence of God and confess his sins and be forgiven.

2. It means that one can pray to God all alone and without any regard to the place or circumstances just so long as it is done in the name of Christ and through Him and Him alone.

4. The Protestant believes in the Catholic or Universal Church.

a. He does not believe that the church to which he may happen to belong is the only church. People of other churches may differ from Him in some of their beliefs and may have worshipped God in a manner different from his chosen way of worship, but still belong to the Church of God. There is a story told that illustrates this truth. The story is that when John Wesley went to heaven he asked to be sent where the Methodists were assembled and was told there were no Methodists there. Then he said, "Let me go among the Episcopalians," and was informed there were no Episcopalians there, nor Presbyterians, nor Baptists. He was told that those were not counted by their denominational affiliation, but as those who loved the Lord. A Protestant believes that there shall be people in heaven from every denomination, not because of what church they belonged to, but because they were believers in Christ as Savior.

b. But true Protestants believe in the church as God's agent for preaching of the Gospel of the Good News of salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. He reserves to himself the right and privilege of belonging to whatever branch of the Church he may choose, but surely a Christian Protestant does not believe that he has the freedom to ignore the worship and service of the true Church of God. Here again we Protestants face the grave danger of using our freedom as an excuse to neglect the Church of God and to absent ourselves from His program of worship and service. But that is a right I do not believe we can contend has been delegated to us of and from God. Surely we should find some place of worship and service.

Conclusion:

1. We believe in our right to worship God as we please.

a. Does not mean we have the freedom not to worship at all.

2. We reject the authority of any Church or government to dictate to us how we should act or what we should believe.

a. But that does not mean we have the right to renounce the authority of God's revelation.

3. We declare our belief to be saved by God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

a. But that does not mean we have the right to determine our own method or plan of salvation.

4. We declare our belief that we are as much priests in the sight of God as any man.

a. But that does not mean that we have the right to neglect our duties as priests.

5. We declare we do not believe in the authority of any church.
 - a. But that does not mean that we do not have any obligation to some church, the church of our choice.