

DEATH OF THE PROTESTANT



If one had to point the birth of the Protestant Reformation to one single moment in time—one single event—it would be, without a doubt, October 31, 1517. That was the moment Martin Luther posted the ninety-five thesis on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, setting the Protestant Reformation on fire. In the 95 Thesis, Luther noted 95 ways in which the church had departed from the plain teachings of the Bible. As a result, Luther was labeled as an extremist, a fundamentalist, and an antagonist.

Luther's act split the church. One group desired to implicitly and unreservedly follow and obey God's word. They believed that God's word mattered, that doctrines mattered, and that the truth mattered. They believed God had given the specific instructions in the Bible and that these truths were to be defended and preserved at all cost. The other group felt that Luther was too extreme. Too fanatical. Too divisive. They felt that as long as one believed in Jesus, God wasn't so particular about the details of the truth. They felt that specific doctrines were not as important as a relationship with Jesus and rejected Luther's revolt as being petty, unimportant, and divisive.

Those who felt that the truth mattered left Catholicism, the established church of the time, because it had departed from the truths of God's word. This departure from truth had all been predicted

by the apostles. Paul said, "the time will come when... they will turn their ears away from the truth" (2 Tim. 4:4). Peter also warned that there would arise "false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Pet. 2:1). This was fulfilled in the early Christian church when Christianity mingled with pagan Rome, compromising the truths of God's word and accepting false teachings.

As Luther studied His Bible, He began to see that many of the doctrines introduced into the church were not supported by the Bible, such as purgatory, penance, prayers to saints, papal infallibility, priestly confession, canonizing dead saints, the necessity of daily mass, the sale of indulgences, the Immaculate Conception, transubstantiation, praying the rosary, clergy celibacy, and more. While some felt Luther should just ignore the inconsistencies and try to get along with the church, Martin Luther felt that these truths were too important to be ignored. He protested these false doctrines and was labeled a "Protest"-ant, a name synonymous with the revolution he started.

Those who believed that truth mattered enough to defend it and even make changes for it were willing to leave the comfortable traditions they had grown accustomed to in the Catholic Church. They believed that truth mattered, and they were willing to give up their church in order to follow God. As these

“protesters” left Catholicism, they continued to weed out the errors that had been introduced into the Christian Church during the middle ages. Over time, new Protestant churches would rise up, revealing new truths. Luther presented the truth about justification by faith. Baptists presented the truth about baptism by immersion. Methodists presented truths about sanctification. As new truths were discovered, those who were willing to wholly follow God left the error. This love for truth, willingness to search for the truth, and determination to defend the Bible at all cost was the spirit of Protestantism.

Today, the Protestant is a dying breed, on the verge of extinction. Most Protestants are no longer searching for truth, no longer searching to expel the lies introduced into the Catholic Church. On the contrary! Today, many Protestants say that we should just lay aside our doctrinal differences in the name of unity. We are being told, “Jesus is more important than doctrine,” yet even Jesus called believers to guard themselves against the false “doctrines of the Pharisees” (Matt. 16:12). The Bible consistently cautions us to guard against “doctrines of demons” and “contend earnestly for the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1; Jude 3). While many are telling us to set aside doctrinal differences, the Bible tells us to contend for the doctrines that the church was founded on, just as

Martin Luther did when he presented the 95 Thesis, igniting the Protestant Reformation.

This call to ignore doctrinal differences in the name of unity is the sword that is killing the Protestant. It suggests that defending the truth is not as important as unity, but the Bible never called believers to unity *in spite of* the truth, but rather to unity *in* the truth. Unity must be founded on the basis of truth, and there are still truths to be uncovered. As Protestants, we are not called to ignore doctrines. The Protestant was founded on a determination to find out the truth and defend it. Sadly, the last of the true Protestants are often viewed as divisive simply for holding or even considering differing views, just as Martin Luther was, but there is still a cause to be defended, and those true Protestants who still desire to know the truth must rise up to meet the challenge.

Today I dare say that most Protestants have been lulled to sleep by pastors who preach “smooth things,” “because they did not receive the love of the truth” (Isa. 30:10; 2 Thes. 2:10). They no longer love truth. They no longer desire to find out which church teaches closest to the Bible truths. Instead, they have become comfortable with their faith and are no longer willing to grow or look into new things. They are not willing to “test all things,” like those in Berea who “received the word with all readiness, and searched

the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (1 Thes. 5:21; Acts 17:11). Their faith is stagnant and comfortable. They are not true Protestants in spirit, but in name only. They have grown up in their church and have gone along with whatever their pastor has taught with blind allegiance, unwilling to investigate the truth, but there are still truths to be uncovered.

The Reformation is not over. Truth must be restored. Churches have risen, challenging traditional Christian beliefs on major topics. They challenge issues on such topics as, "Will God torture sinners in hell for eternity while we enjoy the bliss of heaven?" "Do we go straight to heaven the moment we die, and if so, why is there a resurrection?" "Why did all Protestants once identify the Catholic Church as the antichrist, then change views?" "Is there any Bible evidence that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday?" "Does the Bible teach that the rapture will take place before the tribulation?" While some would like to initially brush these questions off, the true spirit of Protestantism demands an honest investigation on both sides of each issue. Those who are willing to lay aside their preconceived ideas and honestly consider the issues will find that these questions are supported with Bible verses that make valid and reasonable cases on both sides of the issues, and those who still

possess the spirit of Protestantism must honestly consider these issues. Sadly, there are few true Protestants left. There is no one left who is willing to challenge the established beliefs and teachings of the church in search of truth.

Many today have the spirit of Catholicism, which has traditionally taught that the Bible is too difficult for common people and should be explained by the priest. Instead of investigating the Bible honestly and personally wrestling with God in His word, many take every challenging issue to their pastor, to whom they have unwavering allegiance, who then silences their convictions and leaves God's word powerless. As long as this goes on, there will be no growth, and Protestantism, which is threatened with extinction, will finally be lost. If we would keep the Spirit of Protestantism alive, we must be willing to look into God's word honestly and openly. We must be willing to throw away all our preconceived ideas, step out of our comfortable pews, and face the fire of God's word to refine us. The hope to keep the Reformation alive is up to you. You must bear the torch of the Reformation, or else the flame, which is now dwindling down to an ember, will finally die out. Please, don't let it die on your watch.

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