



Covenant Reformed News

November 2017 • Volume XVI, Issue 19

What Is a Protestant? (5)

Having seen what a Protestant is historically, theologically, creedally and ecclesiastically, we now need to consider this question: What is a son or daughter **of the Reformation ethically? How does Protestantism influence one's lifestyle?**

Many things could be said here but I will highlight just two points.

First, a Protestant loves and speaks the truth. Part of the background for this is historical. It is Jesuit teaching that it is okay, even virtuous, to tell a lie, if it serves the Roman Catholic Church. A degree of this moral ambiguity concerning the ninth commandment has hung over Roman Catholicism for many centuries. Think of the lies and cover-up in the Roman church, especially over the last several decades, regarding their homosexual priests who sexually abuse little boys.

Protestantism's concern for truth flows from its **solas** or "**onlys**." *Sola Scriptura* declares, "**thy word is truth**" (John 17:17). Salvation is *solus Christus* for He is "**the way, the truth, and the life**" (John 14:6). Jehovah alone is glorified (*solī Deo gloria*) as the "**God of truth**" (Deut. 32:4) by our keeping the ninth commandment: "**Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour**" (Ex. 20:16).

Also the gospel truth of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) also promotes honesty. In Psalm 32, David rejoices in the forgiveness or non-imputation of his sins: **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (1-2).** For believers, the non-imputation of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness always go hand in hand (Rom. 4:6-8). Now notice what Psalm 32:2 adds: **“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” One who is truly blessed because of the non-imputation of his sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to him by faith alone is honest before God, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Whereas fallen man instinctively and wickedly covers and hides his transgressions, the true believer confesses his sins, both for the first time and throughout his Christian life. Therefore, the child of God is honest, speaking the truth both to himself and to others, for in his “spirit there is no guile.”**

Second, there is what has been called the Protestant work ethic. This too flows from the Five Solas or “onlys” of the Reformation. According to *sola Scriptura*, we must keep the fourth commandment out of gratitude, and so we labour for six days and rest upon the Christian Sabbath, which is called the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10), by spending the day in the private and public worship of God. We emulate our Saviour, Christ alone (*solus Christus*), who did the work His Father gave Him (John 4:34; 17:4). We are justified by faith alone (*sola fide*) and the faith which alone receives the imputed righteousness of God is also a faith that works, for we are justified by faith alone but not a faith that is alone. We are saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*) and so we do our work out of gratitude for a wholly gracious salvation. In keeping with the Reformation principle of *solī Deo gloria*, we labour to honour and serve the Triune God, and not merely man.

True Protestants believe that they ought to do honest and hard work, and they engage in it. Think of the French Huguenots and the terrible negative effect on

France economically when they were persecuted and driven out of that country, especially through evil King Louis XIV's Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685).

The Protestant work ethic is based on two other biblical and Protestant truths. The first is the priesthood of all believers. It is not only the case that the Christian **minister's faithful work is of value in God's eyes; the work of all His people is holy** when it is done out of faith and to please Him in Jesus Christ. The second biblical and Reformation truth that supports the Protestant work ethic is that of calling. It is not only preachers or elders or deacons who are called to their church offices. Instead, all Christians are called by God to work in whatever lawful employment He has given them in His providence. So it does not matter to the Lord how low paid **your job may be or how menial and supposedly humble it is. No work is "beneath"** you, when it is done to the glory of God. Our Saviour laboured manually for many years as a carpenter! This is an important point to make in our day when Western secularist ideas are degrading the good creation ordinance of work, and many people foolishly think that there is more dignity in being unemployed than in a low-paid job.

Listen to the refreshing biblical teaching of Colossians 3:22-24: **"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."** The motto of the Protestant work ethic is, in effect, **"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"** (Ecc. 9:10).

So are *you* a Protestant? Doctrinally, do you hold to the Five Solas of the Reformation (Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone and the glory of God alone) and to the great Protestant creeds? Practically, do you speak the truth, and believe and engage in hard, honest work? Historically, are you rooted in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, which is pure, apostolic Christianity?

Then keep on witnessing to the truth of God, working for the ongoing reformation of the church and fighting the good fight of faith! *Rev. Stewart*

The Christian's Financial Giving

Question: "I would like to ask a question regarding giving to pastors and giving to the poor. As for pastors, the Scriptures repeatedly quote Deuteronomy 25:4: 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn' (Matt. 10:10; I Cor. 9:9; I Tim. 5:18). As for the poor, the Bible speaks of giving cheerfully and according to our ability (Deut. 16:17; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:7). Does Scripture apply the same principle to the two or are they different? If they are the same, how can it be proved? If the two are different, how is the pastor to live from the gospel (I Cor. 9:14)? What is the practical implication of this principle? I have read that Presbyterian churches in the seventeenth century (and other times as well) used obligatory church taxes. Is this in conformity with the Bible?"

I have quoted the entire question because the reader gives his reasoning in it, and because the question is important. Disagreement over the answer is not uncommon.

The only offices Christ has ordained in His church are minister, elder and deacon. This is agreed upon by almost all Reformed and Presbyterian churches, although some reckon that the office of minister of the Word and sacraments is a sub-division of the office of elder. The result of this view is that Christ has ordained teaching elders and ruling elders in the church, but two groups with differing responsibilities.

We do not intend to argue the point here, although Scripture makes clear that the three offices in the Old Testament are all carried over into the new dispensation when the church received its New Testament form. The prophetic office became the office of pastor-teacher; the kingly office became the office of elder in the New Testament church; and the priestly office became the office of deacon. These new dispensational offices in the church are the special offices that arise out of, and are responsible to, the office of believer. All God's people are prophets, priests and kings.

The duties of each office are basically the same in one respect. Ministers preach the gospel, elders rule in the church and deacons care for the poor (Acts 6), but all three offices bring the Word of God to His people. These offices and duties in turn reflect the three-fold office of Christ who is our chief Prophet, our only high Priest and our exalted King.

Hence, without going into any more detail on this beautiful structure Christ has given to the church, and by means of which He Himself is present in the church, let us note that the office of deacon is established by Christ for the care of the poor.

It is a special gift of God that He Himself gives to the church the poor. Christ reminds us of this in His statement: “ye have the poor with you always” (Mark 14:7). The Bible speaks often of God’s special care of His poor. The care of the poor is the highest manifestation in the church of the communion of the saints, and the highest fulfilment of Scripture’s injunction to bear each other’s burdens “and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). To give to the poor is a blessed activity because it is more blessed to give than to receive. The congregation that is without the poor loses something of the blessedness of the Saviour’s presence in the church and it ought to find other ways to care for the poor in sister churches or in other congregations in their own denomination.

Ministers of the gospel are not among the poor, nor are their wives and children. They are not the objects of benevolence. They are not to be cared for by the deacons. They are not given to the church as part of Christ’s promise: “ye have the poor with you always.” In fact, the office of deacon was instituted in the church, not to care for ministers but because ministers are (and ought to be) too busy to do the work of caring for the poor.

Ministers have no time to engage in secular work either. Pastors ought to be giving themselves over to the study of God’s Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). If a minister has to take another job to provide for his wife and family, the congregation will suffer. This is not to say that so-called tent-making ministers are sinning. But I have talked with a few and, with one accord, each agreed that it would help his church or mission work, if he could labour full time as a minister.

The principle that “The labourer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7) is what the law meant when Israel was commanded not to muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. An ox did work for the family that owned it and thus had a claim on some of its master’s earthly possessions. It was, after all, due to the ox’s work that the family had enough to obtain the necessities of life. The family owed the ox its living. It was not benevolence that prompted Israel to give the ox free access to the food that it had helped to produce.

That principle was carried over into the new dispensational church, and the relation between an ox and its owner is the same as the relation between the minister and his congregation. To refuse the minister material support forces him to spend valuable time in earthly things and the congregation suffers spiritually.

It is true that in most congregations deacons take collections for other causes than help for the poor: Christian schools, congregational or denominational kingdom causes, etc. But none of this is benevolence. These other financial matters are taken care of by the diaconate for convenience but they need not be done in this way.

The last question asked was concerning the rightness or wrongness of “obligatory church taxes.” The word “taxes” is inappropriate to ecclesiastical giving. In the Protestant Reformed Churches in the U.S. and Canada, we call this the annual budget. The budget covers all the expenses of a local congregation at a certain rate per family, per-week. It is not an obligatory

tax; it is an amount that informs the congregation what the costs of the church are outside the benevolent fund. In this matter also the principle holds: One must give as he has been blessed. Budgeting is an excellent way to give systematically to cover the expenses of the church. It is not benevolence.

It is necessary for people to determine how much to give to each kingdom cause, including the schools. In our congregation and, I think, in most, two collections are taken every Sunday, besides the budget and benevolence. As good stewards in God's house, every family must decide how much to give to every need in the church. That amount is determined by the need of each cause in relation to all the other causes.

Giving is never an obligation; it is always a privilege. And the widow's mite is more in God's sight than a thousand dollars or pounds. *Prof. Hanko*

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