

## ***EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH – Jan. 2023***

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### ***“PROTESTANT NO LONGER”***

The apostles and prophets of the first century (the apostolic era) gave us the New Testament Scriptures (cf. Eph. 2:20; 3:5-6). Then copies of copies of copies of the NT Scriptures began to circulate throughout the known world. Then in the era of the early Church fathers they recognized 27 NT books as the NT canon of inspired Scripture with the leading criteria that it had to have been written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle (cf. the church councils at Hippo Regius (AD 397) and Carthage (AD 397)).

Following the era of the apostles (c. AD 30- AD 95) the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ endured much suffering and persecution in the Roman Empire. Then onto the scene came the emperor Constantine who sought above all to have unity in his empire. And part of the strategy to achieve this was to legalize Christianity and give it favored status in the empire (c. A.D 325). This marriage of the state and the Church was devastating to the spiritual well-being of the Church.

Out of this context developed what became known as the Roman Catholic Church. It happened little by little. The worship of Mary took off in earnest with the Council of Ephesus in 431; the doctrine of purgatory was put in place in 593; claims to Papal supremacy took root in 606 and then for the next one thousand years (from 590-1517) we have what is called “The Age of Popes” or more commonly “The Dark Ages”.

Then came the PROTESTANT REFORMATION. This was a widespread theological revolt against the Roman Catholic Church led by a number of KEY Reformers. I personally associate with the “Radical Reformers” (the solid ones) who jettisoned infant baptism in favor of biblical believer’s baptism. A MAJOR turning point event was when Martin Luther famously posted his Ninety-Five Theses on Wittenberg Church door on Oct. 31 in 1517. This began a seismic chain reaction of rebelling against Rome’s authority and claiming the BIBLE alone as the source of authority for all matters of faith and practice. The Reformers emphasized what is known as the five SOLAS. Sola is a Latin word which means **“alone”**. The five SOLAS of the Reformation were: 1) Sola Scripture (Scripture Alone), 2) Sola Gratia (Grace Alone), 3) Sola Fide (Salvation by “Faith Alone”), 4) Solus Christus (In Christ Alone), and 5) Soli Deo Gloria (For the “Glory of God Alone”).

At the heart of the reformation was the issue of SALVATION. The cardinal doctrine was justification by GRACE ALONE through FAITH ALONE in CHRIST ALONE. Protestants were PROTESTORS. They PROTESTED that the Roman Catholic Church with all of its “additions” was errant in its teaching about salvation! Nothing was more fundamental or important than this! Protestants protested that Jesus ALONE is Savior and not the Church. Sacraments do nothing to help provide salvation. Mary can do nothing to help a person on to God. Purgatory is not a biblical doctrine. Thus, the lines of PROTEST were clearly drawn.

**BUT** much of the so-called “Protestant” Church is protesting no more. In a recent survey conducted by Ligonier Ministries in partnership with Lifeway Research they found that 56% of professing evangelicals now believe that faith in Jesus is not the only way to God. Thus, they are not PROTESTING anything anymore! They are accepting not only of all forms of professing Christendom but think that “God accepts the worship of all religions”. Only a relative few now hold to any form of the SOLAS originally tied to the Reformation leading many to ask the question: **“Is the Reformation over?”** In practical reality for MANY professing evangelicals the answer is “YES”. For them it is over! They are no longer earnestly contending for the faith in any form. Such people are PROTESTANT no longer because in fact they are APOSTATES!

**Thot:** Salvation is by GRACE alone through FAITH alone in CHRIST alone according to SCRIPTURE alone to the GLORY of God alone!

***Earnestly Contending, Pastor Dwight J. Oswald***