

## A Word to a Protestant

1. Do not you call yourself a Protestant? Why so? Do you know what the word means? What is a Protestant? I suppose you mean one that is not a Papist. But what is a Papist? If you do not know, say so; acknowledge you cannot tell. Is not this the case? You call yourself a Protestant; but you do not know what a Protestant is. You talk against Papists; and yet neither do you know what a Papist is. Why do you pretend, then, to the knowledge which you have not? Why do you use words which you do not understand?
2. Are you desirous to know what these words, *Papist* and *Protestant*, mean? A Papist is one who holds the Pope or Bishop of Rome (the name *papa*, that is, *father*, was formerly given to all Bishops) to be head of the whole Christian Church; and the Church of Rome, or that which owns the Pope as their head, to be the only Christian Church.
3. In a course of years, many errors crept into this Church, of which good men complained from time to time. At last, about two hundred years ago, the Pope appointed many Bishops and others to meet at a town in Germany, called Trent. But these, instead of amending those errors, established them all by a law, and so delivered them down to all succeeding generations.
4. Among these errors may be numbered, their doctrine of seven sacraments; of transubstantiation; of communion in one kind only; of purgatory, and praying for the dead therein; of veneration of relics; and of indulgences, or pardons granted by the Pope, and to be bought for money.

It is thought by some, that these errors, great as they are, do only defile the purity of Christianity; but it is sure, the following strike at its very root, and tend to banish true religion out of the world:-

5. First. The doctrine of merit. The very foundation of Christianity is, that a man can merit nothing of God; that we are "*justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ;*" not for any of our works or of our deservings, but by faith in the Blood of the covenant.

But the Papists hold, that a man may by his works merit or deserve eternal life; and that we are justified, not by faith in Christ alone, but by faith and works together.

This doctrine strikes at the root of Christian faith, the only foundation of true religion.

6. Secondly. The doctrine of praying to saints, and worshipping of images. To the Virgin Mary they pray in these words: "O Mother of God, O Queen of heaven, command thy Son to have mercy upon us!" And, "The right use of images," says the Council of Trent, "is to honour them, by bowing down before them." (Sess. 25, para. 2.)

This doctrine strikes at the root of that great commandment (which the Papists call part of the first), "*Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them,*" that is, not any image whatsoever. It is gross, open, palpable idolatry, such as can neither be denied nor excused; and tends directly to destroy the love of God, which is indeed the first and great commandment.

7. Thirdly. The doctrine of persecution. This has been for many ages a favourite doctrine of the Church of Rome. And the Papists in general still maintain, that all heretics (that is, all who differ from them) ought to be compelled to receive what they call the true faith; to be forced into the Church, or out of the world.

Now, this strikes at the root of, and utterly tears up, the second great commandment. It directly tends to bring in blind, bitter zeal; anger, hatred, malice, variance; every temper, word, and work that is just contrary to the loving our neighbour as ourselves.

So plain it is, that these grand Popish doctrines of merit, idolatry, and persecution, by destroying both faith, and the love of God and of our neighbour, tend to banish true Christianity out of the world.

8. Well might our forefathers protest against these: And hence it was that they were called Protestants; even because they publicly protested, as against all the errors of the Papists, so against these three in particular: The making void Christian faith, by holding that man may merit heaven by his own works; the overthrowing the love of God by idolatry, and the love of our neighbour by persecution. Are you then a Protestant, truly so-called? Do you protest, as against all the rest, so in particular against these three grand fundamental errors of Popery? Do you publicly protest against all merit in man? all salvation by your own works? against all idolatry of every sort? and against every kind and degree of persecution?

I question not but you do. You publicly protest against all these horrible errors of Popery. But does your heart agree with your lips? Do you not inwardly cherish what you outwardly renounce? It is well if you who cry out so much against Papists are not one yourself. It is well if you are not yourself (as little as you may think of it) a rank Papist in your heart.

9. For, First, how do you hope to be saved? by doing thus and thus? by doing no harm, and paying every man his own, and saying your prayers, and going to church and sacrament? Alas! alas! Now you have thrown off the mask: This is Popery barefaced. You may just as well speak plain, and say, "I trust to be saved by the merit of my own works." But where is Christ all this time? Why, He is not to come in till you get to the end of your prayer; and then you will say, "for Jesus Christ's sake" - because so it stands in your book. O my friend, your very foundation is Popish. You seek salvation by your own works. You trample upon the "Blood of the covenant." And what can a poor Papist do more?

10. But let us go on: Are you clear of idolatry any more than the Papists are? It may be, indeed, yours is in a different way. But how little does that signify! They set up their idols in their churches; you set up yours in your heart. Their idols are only covered with gold or silver; but yours is solid gold. They worship the picture of the Queen of Heaven; you, the picture of the Queen or King of England. In another way, they idolise a dead man or woman; whereas your idol is yet alive. O how little is the difference before God! How small pre-eminence has the money-worshipper at London, over the image-worshipper at Rome; or the idoliser of a living sinner, over him that prays to a dead saint!

11. Take one step farther: Does the Papist abroad persecute? Does he force another man's conscience? So does the Papist at home, as far as he can, for all he calls himself a Protestant. Will the man in Italy tolerate no opinion but his own? No more, if he could help it, would the man in England. Would you? Do not you think the Government much overseen, in bearing with any but those of the Church? Do not you wish they would put down such and such people? You know what you would do if you were in their place. And by the very same spirit you would continue the Inquisition at Rome, and rekindle the fires in Smithfield.
12. It is because our nation is overrun with such Protestants, who are full of their own good-deservings, as well as of abominable idolatry, and of blind, fiery zeal, of the whole spirit of persecution, that the sword of God, the great, the just, the jealous God, is even now drawn in our land; that the armies of the aliens are hovering over it, as a vulture over his prey; and that the open Papists are on the very point of swallowing up the pretended Protestants.\*
13. Do you desire to escape the scourge of God? Then I entreat you, First, be a real Protestant. By the Spirit of God assisting you (for without Him you know you can do nothing), cast away all that trust in your own righteousness, all hope of being saved by your own works. Own, your merit is everlasting damnation; that you deserve the damnation of hell. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Lie in the dust. Let your mouth be stopped; and let all your confidence be in the "Blood of sprinkling;" all your hope in Jesus Christ "the righteous;" all your faith in *"Him that justifieth the ungodly, through the redemption that is in Jesus."*

O put away your idols out of your heart. *"Love not the world, neither the things of the world."* *"Having food to eat and raiment to put on, be content;"* desire nothing more but God. To-day, hear His voice, who continually cries, "My son, give me thy heart." Give yourself to Him who gave Himself for you. May you love God, as He has loved us! Let Him be your desire, your delight, your joy, your portion, in time and in eternity.

And if you love God, you will love your brother also; you will be ready to lay down your life for his sake; so far from any desire to take away his life, or hurt a hair of his head. You will then leave his conscience uncontrolled; you will no more think of forcing him into your own opinions, as neither can he force you to judge by his conscience. But each shall *"give an account of himself to God."*

14. It is true, if his conscience be misinformed, you should endeavour to inform him better. But whatever you do, let it be done in charity, in love and meekness of wisdom. Be zealous for God; but remember, that *"the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;"* that angry zeal, though opposing sin, is the servant of sin; that true zeal is only the flame of love. Let this be your truly Protestant zeal: While you abhor every kind and degree of persecution, let your heart burn with love to all mankind, to friends and enemies, neighbours and strangers; to Christians, heathens, Jews, Turks, Papists, heretics; to every soul which God hath made. *"Let (this) your light shine before men, that they may glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

\* This was written during the late rebellion.

Source: 'Sermons of John Wesley'

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