

74.1 Protest-ants

October 31 is an important date on the calendar. I started to do my anti-Halloween rant for this podcast but decided to take a different approach. Today's podcast is entitled "Protest-ants," and I want to begin it with a story about an African-American Pastor.

In 1934 an African-American Pastor went on a tour of the Holy Land and then to Germany. This Pastor, Michael King, was impressed with the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. He returned to America and legally changed his and his son's names to "Martin Luther." He became Martin Luther King, Sr., and his son, **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, quite a tribute!¹

I am sure you have heard the term "Protestant Church." Protestantism began on October 31, 1517, when the Roman Catholic monk **Martin Luther** nailed his ninety-five issues with the Roman Church on the doors of the Wittenberg church. For years I thought Luther was a wild-eyed rebel challenging the Pope with this move. Eric Metaxas points out in his book on Luther that Martin Luther was trying to help the Roman Catholic Church, not to stir up strife.

Luther studied the scriptures in depth, trying to develop a closer walk with God. As he read the book of Romans, he began understanding the necessity of faith in a Christian's walk with God. One's relationship with God was more significant than merely following a set of actions by rote. So, Martin Luther set out to help the Church incorporate faith into its activities. Let me give you a few verses from Romans (in the NKJV) that you know but were eye-opening to Martin Luther.

3:27-28

²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

4:1-4

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Martin Luther saw that the Roman Church justified its members based on their works and that faith was incidental. The Church endorsed works such as baptism, communion, and the sale of indulgences to vindicate their church members. Doing the actions, with or without faith, was all that mattered. By the way, the sale of indulgences involved raising money to build cathedrals in Rome. Certain priests like **Johann Tetzel** sold indulgences to reduce the punishment for sin in purgatory. Luther opposed this concept since Jesus' vicarious death atoned for our sins, not purchasing indulgences or earning salvation by good works.

Please note that the word "protest" is contained within the word "Protestant." We might pronounce the word as PROTEST-ant to emphasize Luther's protest of the Catholic ecclesiological error.

Martin Luther had no intention of starting a new church or denomination. He wanted to reform the Catholic Church by going back to scripture. However, a sect sprang up bearing his name, the Lutheran Church. In addition to Luther, the church spawned several fiery Pastors who pursued the truth on various fronts.

¹ Metaxas, Eric. *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World*. New York, Viking, 2017, p. 1.

Among these were men like Peter Muhlenberg of Woodstock, Virginia, in our American Revolution; as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemoller, who opposed Adolph Hitler in WWII Germany.

As I look at Luther and his serious disciples, I see people who would rather suffer and fight for truth than submit to ease and error. Having learned the truth, Martin Luther could not recant his position and return to his former state, even when the Pope threatened him. Luther chose the more challenging path of the truth, as did Muhlenberg, Niemolloer, and Bonhoeffer.

Most signers of the Declaration of Independence were from Protestant denominations like the Congregationalists (Puritans), Quakers, Presbyterians, and Episcopal Church. Only one signer, **Charles Carroll** of Maryland, was a Catholic. When the fifty-six signed the Declaration, **Samuel Adams** said, “*This day I trust, the reign of Protestantism will rise.*” Some scholars estimate that 98% of the colonists in the eighteenth century were Protestants.² The protesting attitude of those colonial churches fueled the cause of Liberty in America.

What has happened to the **PROTEST-ant** fire? Most churches that led the way for Liberty are quiet and passive today. These churches have subdued the enthusiasm for truth and determination to defend it. Even those churches that don't want to be called "denominations" are soft on truth today. While they may accurately acknowledge the value of the Bible for our lives, they do so in the safety of their church building. They limit its application to "spiritual issues," not political or governmental. Where is the fire for the truth that affects ALL of life? The passion for standing against the opposition of our first amendment rights as churches has all but disappeared. So has the determination to protect the helpless and demand justice for the oppressed.

I have a series of questions as we begin to wind down:

How can lethargy toward opposing evil with the truth be so prevalent today? Why do we accept the ignorance of contemporary truth? How can we justify Christian absence from the town square?

Have you ever wondered what our forefathers and mothers would think about us? What would have happened to America if the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence had taken our attitudes? Would there have even been an America, or would they have merely given unlimited submission to the King as most contemporary Protestant preachers teach today?

Sometimes I feel like Jeremiah in his discouragement and want to throw in the towel but then I can't. Let me read his thoughts in **Jeremiah 20:9** (NKJV):

**⁹ Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him,
Nor speak anymore in His name.”
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
I was weary of holding it back,
And I could not.**

Let's Keep The Light of Godly Protest Burning!

² Federer, William J. *American Minute*. St. Louis, Amerisearch, Inc., 2012, p. 311.