

Our Foundation is Scripture

1 Corinthians 4:1-6

Why We're Protestant #02

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RAISING kids in their early years you find yourself as a parent teaching very negatively: “Don’t do that, don’t touch this, we don’t believe that.” But then at a certain point you realize you have to start positively training them for life: “Here’s how to mow a lawn, let me show you how to show forgiveness, because God loves us we are to love every neighbor as ourselves.” During our celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation I’m giving a positive vision of **Why We’re Protestant**.

Last Lord’s Day I said the Reformation was not a restoration of the holy catholic church that had been erased but a purification of the church that had been effaced. As Protestants because we’re *Reformed* catholics. Now I want to speak on a second issue: what’s the church’s foundation? Children, here in California there is always the threat of an earthquake. Elsewhere there are floods and hurricanes. Every house needs a foundation to give it stability in whatever comes against it. What is the foundation upon which Jesus wants his church built?

Rome's Foundation of Scripture *and* Tradition

Briefly, let me first outline *Rome's foundation of Scripture and tradition*. During the Protestant Reformation one of the ways the Roman Catholic Church's leadership responded was calling a church Council known as the Council of Trent. Against the Reformation's doctrine that God has spoken in his Word and that all traditions must be judged by what has been written, Rome said it "receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence" the Old and New Testaments and traditions of the Church. Did you hear that? *Equal affection*. Their conclusion was if any one "knowingly and deliberately contemn[s] the traditions...let him be anathema."¹ That means eternally accursed by God. Afterwards the Council's teachings were summarized into a Creed in which Pope Pius IV professed: "I do, at this present, freely profess and truly hold this true Catholic faith, without which no one can be saved." At the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Pope Paul VI decreed this meant "it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty."² Because of this the Pope John Paul II's more recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says the Scriptures and tradition can only be

¹ Session 4, April 8, 1546.

² *Dei Verbum*, II.9. This is also quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 82.

authoritatively interpreted by the Church's bishops who are in obedience to the Pope.³

So what is Rome's foundation? Scripture plus tradition. But really, it's the Pope and others who surround him who alone can speak with authority to the people of God what Scripture says.

Our Foundation of Scripture

I said I want to be positive about **Why We're Protestant** so this brief outline of Rome's view leads to *our foundation of Scripture*. There are a lot of ways we can approach this, but I want you to see it by looking at *the example of 1 Corinthians 3–4*.

Chapters 1–2 explain why Paul wrote this letter: the big struggle in the Corinthian congregation was its internal division between those they deemed “celebrity pastors” (1:10–17). No one falls into this trap anymore, right? Because Paul was onto their agenda he said the remedy was to point away from himself and to preach Christ alone (1:18–2:16). To preach Christ meant preaching the cross—foolishness to the world but the wisdom of God; weakness to the world, but the power of God. Paul

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 83–84.

summarized this by saying he did not come with lofty speech or human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power *so that* and here's the key your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (2:5). To the mature Paul imparted wisdom that came from the Spirit and was spiritually discerned by the Spirit-filled (2:6-16).

But as we come to chapter 3 Paul says the Corinthians were not mature, spiritual people, but infants in the flesh who had to drink milk and couldn't eat meat (3:1-2). So he asks them, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul?" "Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each" (3:5). *Servants*. Keep that word before you as it keeps coming up in this passage. Paul then said of the Corinthians' favorite pastors: "One plants, one waters, but God gives the growth" therefore the planter or waterer is nothing but a mere *servant* (3:6-7). Then he switches metaphors and speaks of a foundation and building. The one foundation is Jesus Christ (3:11) and any minister who builds must build on that already existing foundation (3:10-11). That's the test whether you are called a Pope or pastor. There was a celebrity pastor whom many had pointed out was a narcissist and manipulator who said it's all about Jesus but it

was obviously it was about him. Then it came out he had several affairs and the whole thing came crashing down on him. This past week I saw he had a new website, which is his last name. And there were several posts: one from him describing his past in the passive voice as everything came crashing on him, another by his new pastor saying he deserves grace, and the kicker – one by a fan boy with this line: “The world needs Tullian.” The world doesn’t need us, brothers and sisters. It needs Jesus Christ. Back to Corinthians, in the end what a minister has built will be exposed and judged (3:12–15). This verse gets ripped from its context and applied to salvation; but he’s not talking about salvation, but the rewards for servants of the Word. In the end, God will judge Rome’s and the Reformation’s buildings! And here’s the warning: if one destroys God’s temple God will destroy him (3:17).

That brings us to chapter 4 and back to Paul saying pastors are mere *servants*: “This is how one should regard us, as *servants* of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (4:1). Notice verse 6: “I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be

puffed up in favor of one against another” (4:6). What’s he saying? It’s not about personalities and personal opinions but about service to Christ who has revealed himself his Word – not in the opinions, pontifications, and traditions of men. We are *servants* of the Word. The word Paul uses is of rower on bottom level of ship. We are *stewards*. The word was usually used of a household servant who was the caretaker of the house. We are servants and stewards of “what is written” not merely by Paul but by all that has been written by Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. He’s saying this to say, “Don’t think more highly of the mere men you idolize than Scripture does.”

What Paul says here is consistent with *the evidence of all Scripture*. How are our souls **saved**? “Faith comes by hearing the *word* of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). And as Peter said to Jesus, “You have the *words* of everlasting life” (John 6:68). How are our souls **satisfied**? Man does not live by bread alone but by every *word* of the Lord as the bread of our souls (Matt. 4:4). How are our souls **sanctified**? Jesus prayed to the Father: “Sanctify them by your *word*. Your *word* is truth” (John 17:17). John Chrysostom said ignorance of Scripture was the cause of all evils

including “negligent lives.” To not have the light of the Word in your life means “walking in the worst darkness.”⁴ This is why Jesus says the wise builder is the one that builds upon the solid rock of his word and not the shifting sands of men’s traditions (Matt. 7:24).

Building on This Foundation

This saying of Jesus brings us back to Paul’s metaphor that a true ministers and ministries are built on the one foundation that is Jesus Christ himself as he is revealed in his Word. And beyond what is written, we must not, we cannot, and we will not go! Amen? Because the Word of God says of itself that it saves, satisfies, and sanctifies, we are Protestant. This is not nostalgia; we must continue on, building upon Jesus Christ’s Word. How? Let me give three exhortations in closing.

First, if all this is true, then *crave the Word*. John Chrysostom was called “Chrysostom,” which means “golden tongue,” because he was such an orator. He once said people came to hear him “think[ing] that when they enter[ed the church], that they enter into [the preachers’] presence, they think that they hear from us.” But “they do not lay to heart, they do

⁴ Homily 9 on Colossians; Introductory Homily On Romans.

not consider that they are entering the presence of God, that it is *He* who addresses them.”⁵ Let’s crave the Word! Let’s not come craving a mere Catechism, or the recovering of a tradition, or what Pastor Danny has to say today! Let’s crave the Word.

Second, if all this is true, then *catechize with the Word*. We have an amazing Catechism, brothers and sisters. But it’s amazing because it not only derives truth from Scripture but it takes us back to Scripture. That’s the true test of any writing. It needs to get us into Scripture so that we can get Scripture into us. Again Chrysostom said,

Let us make [children] from the earliest age apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures...Study not to make him an orator, but train him up to be a [Christian] philosopher...all the rhetoric in the world will be of no advantage...These gain a man the kingdom...Whet not his tongue but cleanse his soul.⁶

Third, if all this is true, then *converse around the Word*. Let’s not come craving the Word of the Lord and catechizing our children with the Word only to leave conversing about everything but the Word but everything in the world. One final quote from Chrysostom: “Is it not strange that those who sit in the marketplace tell the names, and races,

⁵ Homily 9 on Thessalonians.

⁶ Homily 21 on Ephesians.

and cities and talents of charioteers and dancers, even accurately state the good and bad qualities of horses, while those who assemble in [the church] understand nothing of what is taking place here and even are ignorant of the number of the [sacred] Books?”⁷ Nothing has changed since the fourth century with us sinners! But take my exhortation and challenge to heart. Talk about the Word today!

Why are we Protestant? Because our foundation is the Word, not the words of men about the Word. Augustine said the so-called church fathers were aware that they needed to be corrected because they were mere men:

Neither weigh we the writings of all men, be they ever so worthy and catholic, as we weigh the canonical scriptures; but that, saving the reverence that is due unto them, we may mislike and refuse somewhat in their writings, if we find that they have thought otherwise than the truth may bear. Such am I in the writings of others, and such would I wish others to be in mine.⁸

⁷ Homily 32 on John.

⁸ Epistle III to Fortunatus.