

BOOK REVIEW

of

Don Kistler (General Editor),

Sola Scriptura!: The Protestant Position on the Bible,

Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995 (3rd printing 1998).

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

One of the battle cries of the Protestant Reformation was *Sola Scriptura!* (the Scriptures Alone!). What it meant was that in terms of Christian doctrine the Scriptures alone are the final authority to which we must appeal and adhere to, and therefore the Scriptures are the final authority about everything Christian. This came up, of course, because Luther and others saw disagreement between the teachings of Scripture and the teachings of the Roman Church. It wasn't that the Roman Church didn't publically acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God, but rather that there was general ignorance, even among clerics, of what the Scriptures teach, and that over the centuries many church doctrines had crept in and became authoritative, and propagated as tradition, that contradicted the clear teaching of Scripture. Therefore, there was a clarion call back to the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God. You may think that this is only of historical interest, but there are at least two reasons why it is of vital importance today: (1) many informed Christians are appalled by the general ignorance of what the Scriptures teach by professing evangelical Christians today, so that another clarion call back to the Scriptures is necessary today, and away from charismatic church leaders who are themselves ignorant of clear doctrine, and (2) because of (1) there is loss in at least part of the evangelical community of just what the Protestant Reformation was about, and even among some a movement to reunite with the Roman Church even though the differences that separated the Reformers from the Roman Church still persist and perhaps have even worsened.

This book, with the general editor of Don Kistler, is authored by many who are well-known to us at Evangel: the "Preface" was written by Bruce Bickel, the "Forward" by Michael Horton, "What Do We Mean By *Sola Scriptura?*" by Robert Godfrey, "Sola Scriptura and the Early Church" by James White, "The Establishment of Scripture" by R.C. Sproul, "The Authority of Scripture" by John Armstrong, "The Sufficiency of the Written Word" by John MacArthur, "Scripture and Tradition" by Sinclair Ferguson, "The Transforming Power of Scripture" by Joel Beeke and Ray Lanning, and the "Postscript" by Don Kistler. To many of us, it seems somewhat simple and we wonder "what's the big deal?" The "big deal" is that all of us are prone to appeal to a mixture of things in our lives, especially when faced with difficult decisions. We base our decisions not just on what God has revealed in Scripture, but upon personal experience, intuition, what our friends say works for them, etc. We may well agree with Bickel in the "Preface," when he says "Christianity is based upon revelation. If God in all His sovereign majesty did not choose to reveal Himself to mankind, there would be no true knowledge of Him nor the possibility of a true relationship with Him. We are bound to Him by what He has chosen to reveal to us about Himself. All the efforts to get to know God by man-created means lead to false religions or mysticisms. ... The revelation of the divine mind and will which we have in *sola Scriptura* is dependent upon revelation from God Himself. It is an example of God's merciful kindness to fallen humanity that He has willed that all of the knowledge needful for a relationship *with* Him, and for correct worship *of* Him, should be provided *by* Him." But we may think we agree with him, and yet ignore such an understanding when we are confronted with decisions in life. After all, learning what the Scriptures teach and tenaciously adhering to them requires work and commitment: things we are all short on when the going gets tough. It is so much easier to "go with the flow," "follow your intuition," "follow your heart," or just "do your own thing," none of which, of course, the Scriptures either teach or condone.

This book does an excellent job of showing that it was the Roman Church that departed from *Sola Scriptura*, which the early Church did, in fact, adhere to. The book is almost an apology for the Protestant Reformation. My only complaint would be that more analysis of the contemporary evangelical Church would have strengthened the book. However, Don Kistler does say in the "Postscript": "Many Charismatics and evangelicals place their personal experience on a par with Scripture, thereby adding to God's written revelation. We hear many tell us that 'God said to me' Surely anything that God has said is authoritative and binding, so we add to Scripture in that way." *Sola Scriptura!!*