

BOOK REVIEW
of
R.C. Sproul,
Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine,
P&R Publishing, 2005.

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

On pages 36 and 37 of this book, R.C. Sproul writes “We earnestly desire dialogue with our evangelical brothers and colaborers who differ from us. We want to heal the wounds that controversy so frequently brings. We know our own views are by no means inerrant. But we believe inerrancy is true and is of vital importance to our common cause of the gospel.” Sproul is being very generous with these words, and with this book. But his burden with this book is, as many others have had before, is to argue that the Bible alone is the written Word of God and absolutely must be our Standard, our source of Truth, and recognized as indeed God’s revelation of Himself to us. Without this, there are dangers on every side: easily shown in the history of theology, easily shown within the lives of individuals. Yet, for whatever the reasons may be, the case must be presented again and again. And Sproul does an excellent job of making the case for the current generation. The book is less than 200 pages long with a relatively large font, and is a fairly easy read.

There are some ten chapters with two appendices. In Part 1, Toward a Doctrine of Scripture, there are four chapters: Chapter 1 is titled *Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism*. Chapter 2 is titled *The Establishment of Scripture*. Chapter 3 is titled *The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis*. Chapter 4 is titled *The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*. In Part 2, *The Inerrancy of Scripture*, there are six chapters. Chapter 5 is titled *The Word of God and Authority*. Chapter 6 is titled *The Word of God and Revelation*. Chapter 7 is *The Word of God and Inspiration*. Chapter 8 is *The Word of God and Inerrancy*. Chapter 9 is titled *The Word of God and Truth*. Chapter 10 is titled *The Word God and You*. Appendix 1 is titled *The Ligonier Statement (1973)*. Appendix 2 is titled *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)*.

In Chapter 1, Spoul reviews the history of *Sola Scriptura* during the Reformation, and also discusses the problems with a view of *Sola Scriptura* that is less than full inerrancy. Sproul writes that “Though the chief theological issue of the Reformation was the question of the matter justification, the controversy touched heavily on the underlying question of authority.” And that is really the question. What is our ultimate authority? Is it the church, is it reason, is it private revelation, or is it the written Word of God? The Reformers claimed that not only was the Scripture a source of authority, but that the Scripture was the sole ultimate source of authority. And that is also the position taken by R.C. Sproul, and argued for, in this book.

Sproul also discusses four problems with limited inerrancy in Chapter 1. “The first major problem we encounter with limited inerrancy is the problem of *canon reduction*. The canon or ‘norm’ of Scripture is reduced *de facto* to that content relating to faith and practice.” “The second serious problem, closely related to the first, is the problem of the relationship of faith and history”. “The third problem we face with limiting inerrancy to matters of faith and practice is an apologetic one.” Finally, “we face the problem of the domino theory” where a pattern in history of a weakened position on Biblical authority often precedes serious defection from orthodoxy.

In Chapter 2, Sproul writes on the formation of the canon. Some claim that it was the church that established the canon. However, Sproul writes that “it is not really proper to speak of the establishing of the canon by the church. It is not the church that established the canon; it is the canon that established the church.” Sproul develops this theme historically.

In Chapter 3, Spoul makes the case for inerrancy. His position is that not only *can* we make the case for inerrancy, but that we *ought* to. In somewhat of a summary statement on page 86, Spoul writes: “Unless we want to join the ranks of the absurd, or unless we confess that God inspires error and join the ranks of the impious, or unless we confess that the Bible as a whole is not inspired, then we are forced by what Martin Luther called ‘resistless logic’ to the conclusion that the Bible is inerrant.”

In Chapter 4, while Spoul argues for the necessity of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, he is not advocating that we should be looking for new revelations but quite the contrary, that the Spirit confirms to our hearts and minds the truthfulness of God’s Word, the Scriptures. This is especially so because of the innate corruptness of the fallen heart: “To be sure, the moral problem touches heavily on the intellect, since the prejudice of the heart against God clouds the mind and makes it ‘dark.’”

Chapter 5 through 10 (Part 2) is Spoul’s commentary on the nineteen articles of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that was adopted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) in 1978. The chapter titles above give some idea of the scope of the Statement. Not only was Sproul active in the ICBI, but so was James Montgomery Boice, well-known to Evangel. Because “the moral problem touches heavily on the intellect,” as mentioned above, the church seemingly needs to continually define what it means by inerrancy. As an example, consider Article VI: ***We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.*** That fact that the ICBI says its so doesn’t make it so, and that was the purpose of Spoul’s commentary to show that this is what the Bible itself teaches.

The two appendixes are certainly of significant worth. They give the *The Ligonier Statement (1973)* and *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978)*.

Describing and defending the Scriptures as the Word of God seems like an endless task, but a necessary one. This book by Sproul is certainly very helpful to that end.