

## THE SCRIPTURE ALONE

### I. Historical Context: The Protestant Reformation

#### A. Martin Luther

- *Sola Scriptura* or Scripture alone was championed by Martin Luther who was born on November 10, 1483 and died on February 18, 1546.
- He also set forth the truths of *sola fide*: faith alone; *sola gratia*: grace alone; *solo Christo*: Christ alone; *solī Deo gloria*: the glory of God alone.

“Late medieval theologians placed Christian tradition alongside the Bible as a source of church doctrine. Luther emphasized instead the primacy of Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

--Timothy George

“In the Middle Ages, most within the church had believed that the Bible and the tradition of the church taught the same, or at least complementary, doctrines. But as Luther and others studied the Bible with a greater care and depth than the church had done in centuries, they began to discover that tradition actually contradicted the Bible.”<sup>2</sup>

--Robert Godfrey

- Martin Luther, before the Holy Roman emperor Charles V (who was also Charles I of Spain), was asked at the Diet of Worms in the Spring, 1521 to recant and given 24 hours to reconsider. His response:

“Unless, I am convinced by sacred Scripture, or by evident reason, I cannot recant, for my conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do none other. God help me! Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

--Martin Luther

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Godfrey, “What Do We Mean by *Sola Scriptura*,” *Sola Scriptura*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther.

## B. Roman Catholicism

### 1. Authority: The Interpretation of Mother Church

- Rome considered the teaching office of the church to be infallible. Protestants respected it but considered it fallible. For the Reformers only Scripture was infallible.

➤ “Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books”

“Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds.”<sup>4</sup>

--Council of Trent  
Fourth Session, April 8, 1546

- The Roman Catholic church believed the self-study of Scripture would do violence to the unity of doctrine with the result that people would fight against the authority of the church. Therefore, the less they knew the better.

➤ “Decree Concerning Justification” (Chapter XVI)

Canon 9 “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification,...let him be anathema.”<sup>5</sup>

--Council of Trent  
Sixth Session, Jan 13, 1547

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<sup>4</sup> John Leith, ed. *Creeds of the Churches*, pp. 403-404.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

➤ “Concerning the Infallible Teaching of the Roman Pontiff”

“We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals: and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

--The Vatican Council  
1870

2. Sufficiency: Scripture, Tradition, and Papal Decrees

➤ “Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures”

“It also clearly perceived that these truths and rules were contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions...it receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testament...also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or to morals, as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic church in unbroken succession.”<sup>7</sup>

--Council of Trent  
April 8, 1546

➤ “The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception”

“We declare, pronounce and define that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her Conception was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, by the singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, and that this doctrine was revealed by God, and therefore, must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.”<sup>8</sup>

--Pope Pius IX, 1854

➤ “The Dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 456-457.

<sup>7</sup> Leith, p. 402.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

"We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory."<sup>9</sup>

-Papal Bull, 1950

## II. *Sola Scriptura*: The Contemporary Necessity

### A. The Present Danger

- The Reformers believed in the singular authority, fundamental clarity and total sufficiency of Scripture. We are in need of recovering the same beliefs and convictions.
- There is an alarming movement in this country away from doctrine. Doctrine is seen as a hindrance to the purpose of God. Contrary to this ungodly development, God is raising up a people who yearn to know, understand, study and obey his Word.

"This prevalent anti-doctrine spirit is a major departure from the Christian instincts of earlier ages and its roots go deep into contemporary Western culture. In face of the tremendous challenges and opportunities facing the church in the final decades of the twentieth century this dismissal of doctrine is, in my judgment, nothing short of a recipe for disaster."<sup>10</sup>

--Bruce Milne

"We need to remember that truth produces its proper result and error always takes its revenge. Even slight deviations from the facts of revelation may lead eventually to graver aberrations. The best way to avoid error is to define as clearly as possible the norm of truth."<sup>11</sup>

--T.C. Hammond

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Milne, *Know The Truth*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Hammond, p. 14.

- The study of doctrine should lead us to a deeper and truer experience of God. We study doctrine for the purpose of knowing who God is and what pleases him. We are not interested in knowledge without personal application or spiritual experience.
- What we believe determines how we live. We must build biblical convictions and values into our lives that govern the way we think and the way we live. These then become matters of conscience that influence our decisions and determine our priorities.
- We should wisely and humbly take note of those who have a low view of Scripture. Those who in effect give lip service to the Bible but functionally look to other things for truth, direction or emphasis. For example:
  - a. Those who minimize the importance of doctrine.
  - b. Those who denigrate the human mind and exalt the human “spirit”.
  - c. Those who take little time to actually study and teach doctrine.
  - d. Those who poorly interpret Scripture or allegorize Scripture.
    - *2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*
  - e. Those who replace Scripture with humanistic psychiatry, psychology, or sociology.
  - f. Those who functionally replace Scripture with different forms of mysticism.
    - Dreams and visions, revelations, subjective leadings, personal prophecy, getting a “word within the Word.”
  - g. Those who displace Scripture with an emphasis on the sensational and what is to come.
    - Predicting the future, interpreting world events, pursuing physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit.
  - h. Those who judge truth with prophecy or existential “discernment” rather than with Scripture.

## B. The Centrality of Scripture

- Don't divorce the Word from the Spirit or the Spirit from the Word. The Holy Spirit works by and through his Word, which he has produced. The Word is the source of power. It is the Holy Spirit's chosen means. He does not work through the opinions of men or spurious revelations. Where the Word is taught you will find the Holy Spirit at work.

"The function of the prophets and priests was not to add to or even clarify the law; rather, they applied it to the people who were sinfully indifferent."<sup>12</sup>

--Robert Godfrey

### ➤ Small Groups

- We don't gather together to discuss the latest prophecy or dream someone had. We gather to hear and apply the Bible. Unfortunately, studying the Bible is not spiritual enough for some people.

### ➤ The Temptation of Jesus

"And how did He face that temptation? He did not appeal to the oral tradition of Israel; He did not appeal to the authority of the rabbis or Sanhedrin; He did not even appeal to His own divinity or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Our Savior, in the face of temptation, turned again and again and again to the Scriptures. "It is written," he said."<sup>13</sup>

--Robert Godfrey

- The Scriptures are an extraordinary means of grace in our lives.

"The Bible is the only book that is God's direct message to us. You must spend time reading God's Word or you will never mature in your Christian faith."<sup>14</sup>

--Bruce Waltke

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<sup>12</sup> Godfrey, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 79.