



# Evangelicalism, *Sola Scriptura* & ‘Prophecy’.

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by

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What are the true meanings of the above terms? We say ‘true’ because today there appears to be an ever widening of views when these terms are used. These terms have been broadened so much that many Christians are simply unaware as to what they originally meant.

The term ‘*Evangelical*’ now includes almost any who profess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. However, the original term was historically and doctrinally synonymous with the terms ‘*Protestant*’ and ‘*Sola Scriptura*’ (‘*Scripture Alone*’). It came into being during the Reformation. Today many who claim this term have broadened ‘*Evangelical*’ to mean simply the Greek word for ‘Gospel’ (‘*evangel*’). Thus we now have Roman Catholics and Pentecostal/Charismatics including themselves as ‘*Evangelical*’. The former violate true *Sola Scriptura* with another gospel; the latter with the addition of extra-biblical revelations, (including ‘prophecy’ as *foretelling* words from God). Thus some have now coined the phrase ‘neo-evangelical’ to distinguish the modern broad approach in comparison to the original.

To be truly ‘*Evangelical*’ in its original sense is to accept the Reformation pillars including *Sola Fide* (Faith alone) and *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone). But here we come to another problem - some ‘*Evangelicals*’ today also claim *Sola Scriptura* but again have changed the meaning. The Reformers, who shed their own blood by standing for this truth, would doubtless be horrified to see this broadened and diluted.

‘*Sola Scriptura*’ originally meant: ‘*All things necessary for salvation and concerning faith and the spiritual life are taught in the Bible, and clear enough for the ordinary believer to understand it*’. This was not just a Reformation cry but is taught in Scripture and by the early church Fathers. 2Timothy 3:16,17 states clearly that ‘***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works***’. The Greek word here for ‘*perfect*’ is not the common ‘*teleios*’ meaning ‘complete or mature’ but is the word ‘*artios*’ meaning ‘now complete, sufficient, completely qualified’.

Chrysostom in the 3rd. Century, when teaching on 2Tim.3:15-17 stated: ‘*You have Scripture for a master instead of me; from there you can learn whatever you would know*’. (1) Augustine in the 4th Century clearly taught ‘*Sola Scriptura*’: ‘*In those teachings which are clearly based on Scripture*

*are found all that concerns faith and the conduct of life.'* (2) Luther once said: *'Any teaching which does not square with Scripture is to be rejected even if it snows miracles every day.'* (3)

Yet today many say the Spirit is working apart from the Word and in addition to the Word. The Charismatic/Pentecostal Movement allows for prophetic and new revelations, unknown tongues and extra Biblical teaching. The original *Sola Scriptura* Reformers would respond: *if these are Words from God then why do we not add them to the existing canon of Scripture? The truth is that these errors are additions to the Word of God and thus outright attacks on Sola Scriptura!*

The attack on *Sola Scriptura* can be seen in the following two statements which show the process by which this has occurred. (A) 'The Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practise'. (B) 'The Bible is infallible only in matters of faith and practise'. ('Faith and practise' here refer to the sum of Christian living and includes all that is needed for salvation and to live a spiritual life). The deception is in the latter (B) which leads people to think that only part of the Bible is infallible - i.e. that part only that speaks to faith and practice...The next step to apostasy is to deny that the Scriptures are adequate for faith and conduct.

Outside the material in the Bible we are free to make choices one way or another. The Bible does not tell us how to repair our motor vehicle and we are free to consult elsewhere for direction. However, all we need to know in *spiritual matters* and *matters that deal with our soul and Godly living* are written in the Word of God - the Bible.

One of the principle causes of the apostasy is that *Christians are looking to the world for answers to spiritual problems*. Two examples suffice to show how Christians have lowered the original view of *Sola Scriptura*:

Firstly, today Church leaders look to the world for methods of church growth and hence we have the modern 'Church Growth Movement'. This movement unashamedly takes concepts straight out of the world's motivational marketing techniques and dresses them in a Christian veneer. A proliferation of worldly techniques has arguably affected the message of the Gospel to such an extent as to make Christian and non Christian hearers alike comfortable and entertained. The result is that sin and grace are minimised.

Secondly, Christians are increasingly looking more to the world for psychological methods to cure alcoholics, drug addicts and abused people.

Churches have adopted self help groups; ‘co-dependency recovery’ groups; ‘ten step’ programs - all designed to build *self*-esteem, *self*-fulfilment and other humanistic and unbiblical values. Churches now have ‘christian psychologists’ on staff. Although their methods can help change behaviour and habits in practical ways and with medication (the brain is an organ), Christian psychology today teaches Christians to also look outside the Bible for solutions to problems of the soul and the spirit. Psychology has a low view of sin, partly because it has a low view of Scripture.

What do the Scriptures say about looking to the world?: ‘***Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world...***’, (Col.2:8). ‘***In times past you walked according to the course of this world...***’, (Eph.2:2) ‘***And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...***’ (Rom.12:2). The only means to transform our Christian minds is the *all sufficient* Word of God! Although there are many valuable things outside the Bible, *spiritually* all we need to know is in Scripture! The power of God to live a Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit through the *written* Word of God - the Bible. To know the Scriptures is to know the power of God, (Mk.12:24)!

How did Jesus handle attacks from Satan? - by quoting the Word of God - ‘***It is written***’, (Matt.4:6-10). Even the symbols of the Word of God, (‘*lamp*’, ‘*hammer*’, ‘*sword*’, ‘*seed*’), show it’s power. ‘***For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart***’, (Heb.4:12). With the above in mind, do we need psychology and Church Growth methods? How did the saints of last centuries ever survive without such?...they practised *Sola Scriptura*!

*If the Word of God will not change people then forget about using any other methods!*

A most insidious attack on *Sola Scriptura* has come from the Pentecostal/Charismatic sector through their understanding of ‘prophecy’. Confusion here stems from the misunderstanding of what ‘prophecy’ means in the New Testament.

The modern meaning of the verb to ‘*prophecy*’ has in many quarters unfortunately come to mean to predict, to foretell the future, or to put forth

the mind of God. This is certainly indicative of the Old Testament usage but in the New Testament the primary meaning is rather to '*tell forth* [forthtell] *the message of God*'. The New Testament '*prophecy*' is the Greek '*prophetes*' from '*pro*' meaning '*forth*' and '*phemi*' - '*to speak*': *to speak forth the Word of God or to forthtell*. The primary meaning of the word '*prophecy*' in the New Testament is to *forthtell*, not to *foretell*. Since we now have the Word of God in written form in a *closed* canon of Scripture (4), the closest thing to this would be preaching or expounding - *forthtelling* the Word of God *already* contained in the Bible.

In the Old Testament the Word of God was given to men through the prophets or those specifically used by God, (Heb.1:1,2; 2Pet.1:21). The meaning of '*prophet*' in the Old Testament was that of a *speaker of the oracles of God*, one *chosen* by God to speak His Words. Aaron was chosen by God to be a prophet before Pharaoh, (Ex.4,5,7). Many of these men had *immediate* and *direct* communion with God or God chose to communicate to them through dreams and visions, (Num.12:2cp.vs.6; Nu.12:1-8cp. Jer.23; Amos 3:7,8; Gen 20: 7,8,17,18). However, this is not the practice today for we now have the *completed* Word of God!

*Today it is surely grievous to God when we look for more than He has given us in the completed written Scriptures.*

Even where the intent in the New Testament is to *foretell*, almost all the references are quoting something from the *Old Testament*, (E.g. Matt.15:7: '*Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy of you...*'; 1Pet 1:10: '*Of which salvation the [Old Testament] prophets...prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.*') In Luke 1:67 when Zacharias '*prophesied*' he recounts what was *already* promised and *looked forward to* in the Old Testament - that the '*God of Israel*' had '*visited and redeemed His people, and...raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David...by the mouth of His holy prophets...which he swore to our father Abraham...And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest...To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins...*' Again in Acts 2:16,17 on the day of Pentecost the word '*prophecy*' here is not *foretelling* the future but recounting something *already* spoken of in the Old Testament from Joel 2.

There is perhaps only one clear occasion in the New Testament where *foretelling* or predicting seems to be the sole intent - that of Agabus in Acts 11:27,28. However, we *now* have a *closed canon of Scripture* - the

Bible is now *complete*. The faith has been '**ONCE delivered unto the saints**', (Jude 3). God '***spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...***', (Heb.1:1,2). To add to the Word brings the threat of a curse, (Rev.22:18,19 cp. Dt.4:2; 12:3).

In Eph.2:20; 3:5, the prophets were named side by side with the Apostles (the eleven and those who were commissioned by Jesus directly) as the *foundation* of the New Testament church. New Testament prophets were for the New Testament church what Old Testament prophets were for Israel. They maintained the immediate connection between the church and God. They were messengers or communicators.

Pentecostal/Charismatics sometimes admit there is an apparent contradiction between their version of prophesying and the sufficiency of Scripture. However, through a gymnastics of terminology they redefine 'prophecy'. They quote many Old Testament Scriptures such as 1Kings 17:1 where Elijah prophesied saying: '***...according to my word***'. However, *these words went on to become the completed Word of God!*

What is 'prophecy' to us now? What does a '***more sure word of Prophecy***' mean? Does this '***word of prophecy***' include new words from God as seen in Charismatic/ Pentecostalism or in the 'prophets' of today?

A look at 2Peter 1:16-21 reveals the answer. The whole passage is speaking of *false teachers*, false revelations and a departure from the faith!: '***For we have not followed cunningly devised fables...We have also a more sure word of prophecy ...***' But what is this '***more sure word of prophecy***'?...the very next verse tells us!: '***Knowing this first, that no prophecy OF THE SCRIPTURE is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you...***'

This '***prophecy***' in verse 19 is '***prophecy OF THE SCRIPTURE***' (vs.20)! What is this '***Scripture***' to any sound Christian but the 66 books of the Bible! This passage also says '***Holy men of God spake...***' The word '***spake***' is in the Greek aorist tense and indicative mood - meaning it was done *once* as a *completed act* and *not to be repeated*!

Modern day Pentecostal/Charismatics say that their prophesying is in agreement with the Word of God and is the Word simply applied to our present situation. They say their prophesying is the revelation of God's word/will in our present situation. However, they are referring in practice to *foretelling*, rather than *forthtelling* the already completed Word of God. *Sola Scriptura as it was originally taught says that the Word of God is enough and this excluded foretelling any new Words from God!* Still some quote 1Corinthians 14 where the practice of prophesying is mentioned. Again, at the time of the Corinthian church the canon of Scripture had not been completed.

In short, *people who proclaim words directly from God are adding to the Word of God!* They are implying the Bible is not sufficient and they distract people away from written Scripture as being sufficient. *They cannot claim Sola Scriptura as the Reformers taught it!* The fact is there is a glaring contradiction between the Pentecostal/Charismatic practice of 'prophesying' as in *foretelling* and the all sufficiency of Scripture. No amount of rearranging or redefining the definitions of 'prophecy' or *Sola Scriptura* will change this.

Logically, anything outside of God's Word does not have to be 'prophesied' to give people direction or show the will of God. We are *free* to do whatever is outside and not contradictory to the written Word of God. We also have the benefit of prayer and the counsel of many. We simply do not need a 'prophet' or anyone to 'prophesy' words from God. The fruit of today's many false 'prophets' and their false 'prophesies' should drive us back to a reliance on the *all sufficiency of Scripture*.

In this ministry our hearts cry out to true 'Evangelicals' world wide to stand with the Reformers in the true meaning of the word *Evangelical* and to proclaim the original *Sola Scriptura*! Let it not be muddled by movements that would have an ear to hear new words and revelations from God. ***'Every Word of God is pure...add thou not unto His words...'***, (Ps.30:5,6).

(1) '*Sola Scriptura*!' by various authors, P.7

(2) Ibid P.105

(3) Ibid, P.141.

(4) Means rule; measure; complete and regarded as divine.

## About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching, informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

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**TA Ministries** is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

*Diakrisis* is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.