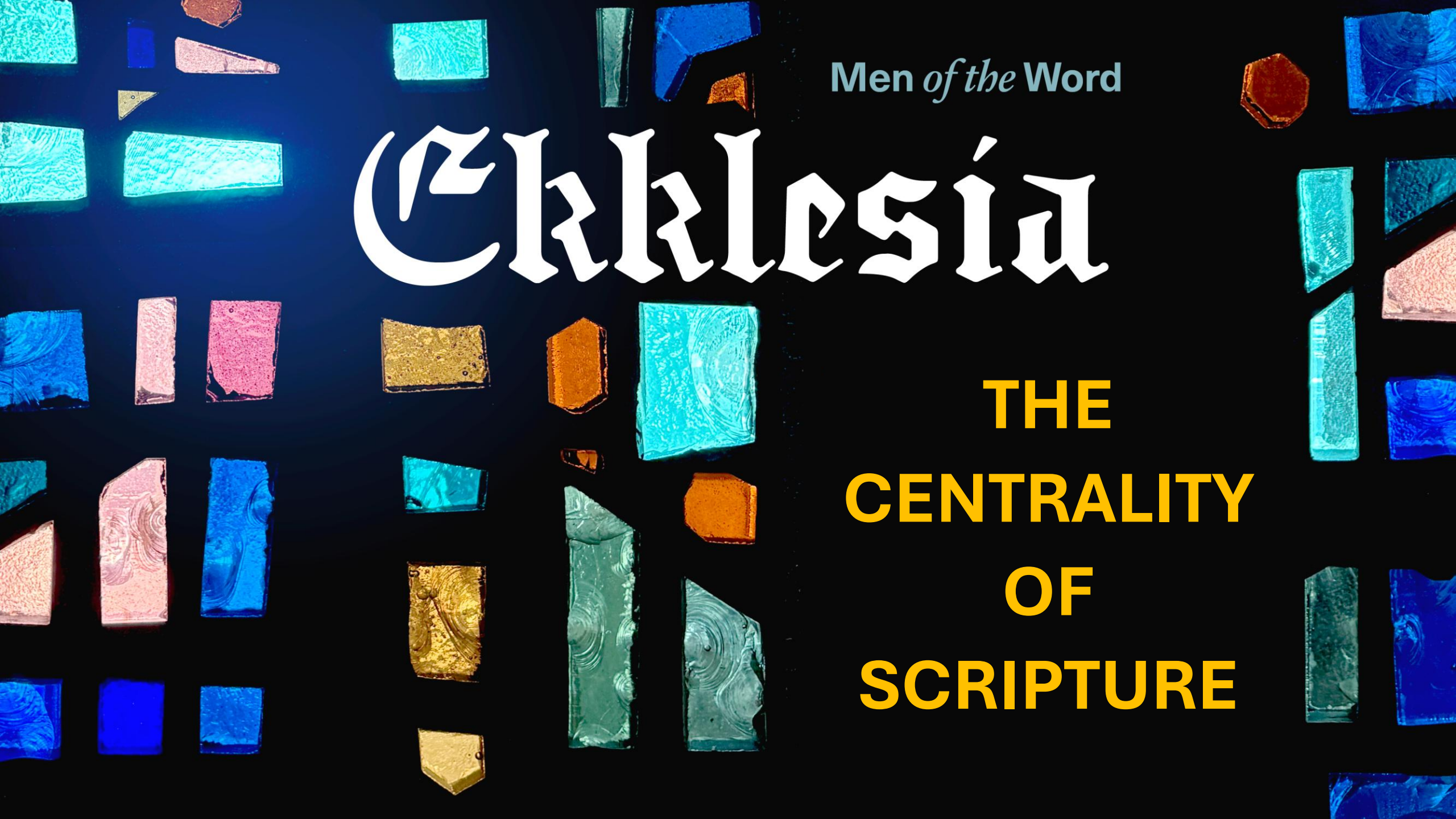




Men of the Word

Ekklesia

**THE
CENTRALITY
OF
SCRIPTURE**

Ju•di•cial Ac•tiv•ism

“Judicial activism occurs when judges decline to apply the Constitution or laws according to their original public meaning or ignore binding precedent and instead decide cases based on personal preference.” —The Heritage Foundation

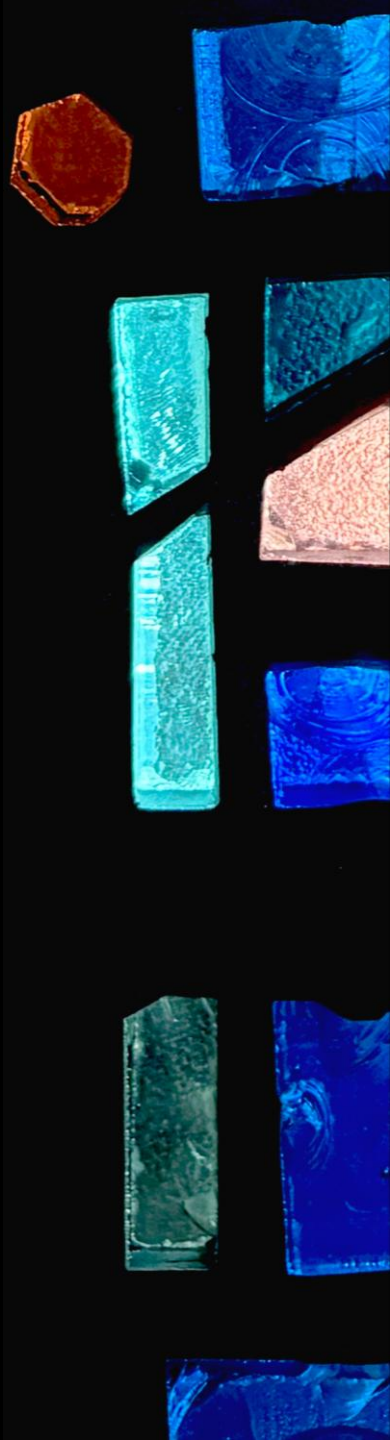
“The role assigned to judges in our system was to interpret the Constitution and lesser laws, not to make them. It was to protect the integrity of the Constitution, not to add to it or subtract from it—certainly not to rewrite it.

For as the framers knew, unless judges are bound by the text of the Constitution, we will, in fact, no longer have a government of laws, but of men and women who are judges. And if that happens, the words of the documents that we think govern us will be just masks for the personal and capricious rule of a small elite.” —President Ronald Reagan

Ec•cle•si•al Ac•tiv•ism

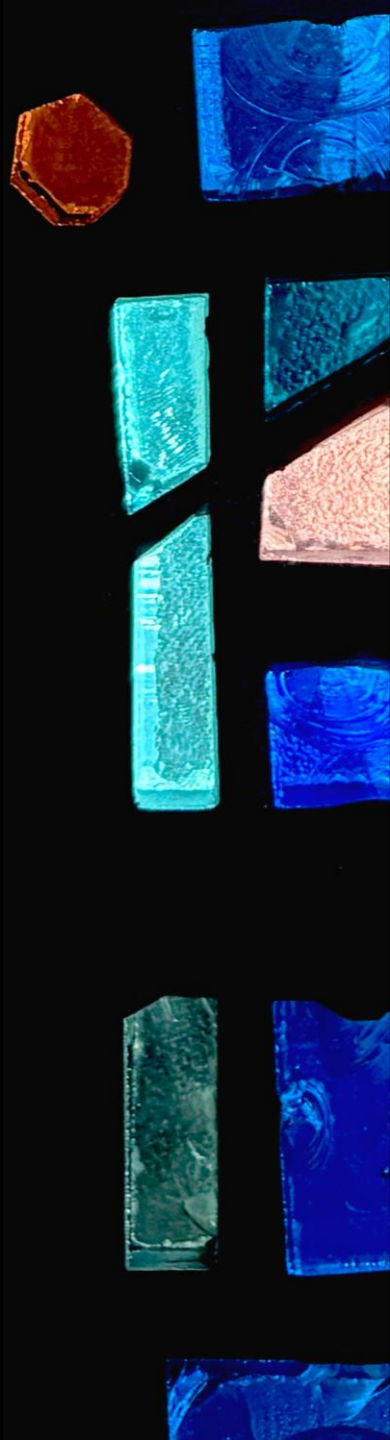
“What has happened in the US system of government almost exactly parallels what happened in the government of the Christian church over the course of many centuries, a development that finds its fullest expression in the Roman Catholic Church.

“The Bible serves as the constitution of the Christian faith. It is the covenant documentation. It defines the Christian church: what constitutes the church, what is its mission, who runs the church and how it should be run, what are the responsibilities of the church, what is the scope of its authority, what laws govern the church and its members, and so forth. . . .



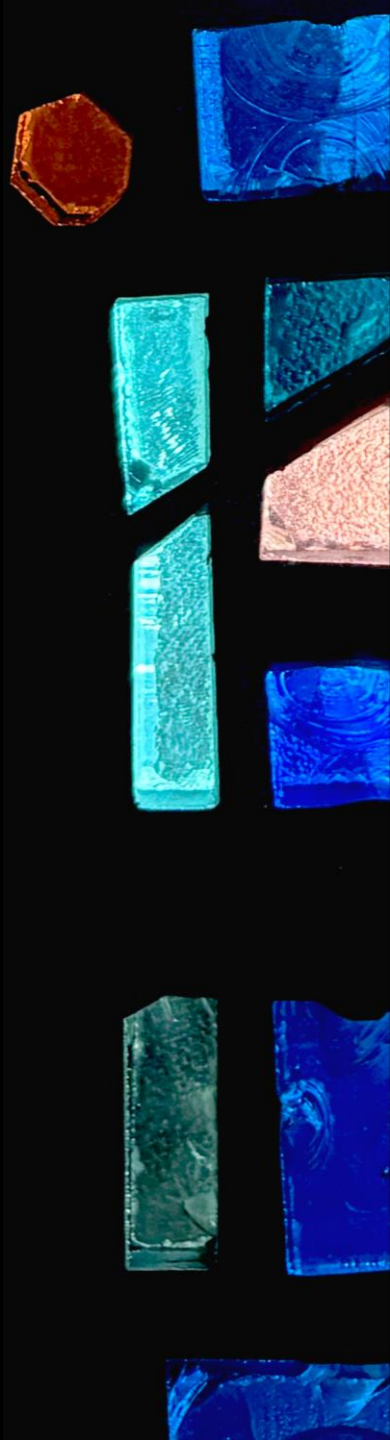
“Once the constitution has been written, the task of the ‘judges’ (the elders/overseers of the church) is to interpret and apply it according to its original intent. Their task is not to create new laws or to come up with ‘interpretations’ that cannot be found in the text of the constitution itself (interpreted according to original intent) and would never have crossed the minds of the ‘founding fathers’ (Eph 2:20).

“Yet that’s just what happened over the course of time with the development of episcopacy, the rise of the papacy, and the increasing weight given to church tradition. . . . If the Bible didn’t say something that the bishops wanted it to say, or thought it should say, they could claim to ‘discover’ new doctrines in the Bible—purgatory, indulgences, apostolic succession, papal infallibility, etc.—and no one would have power to overrule them.

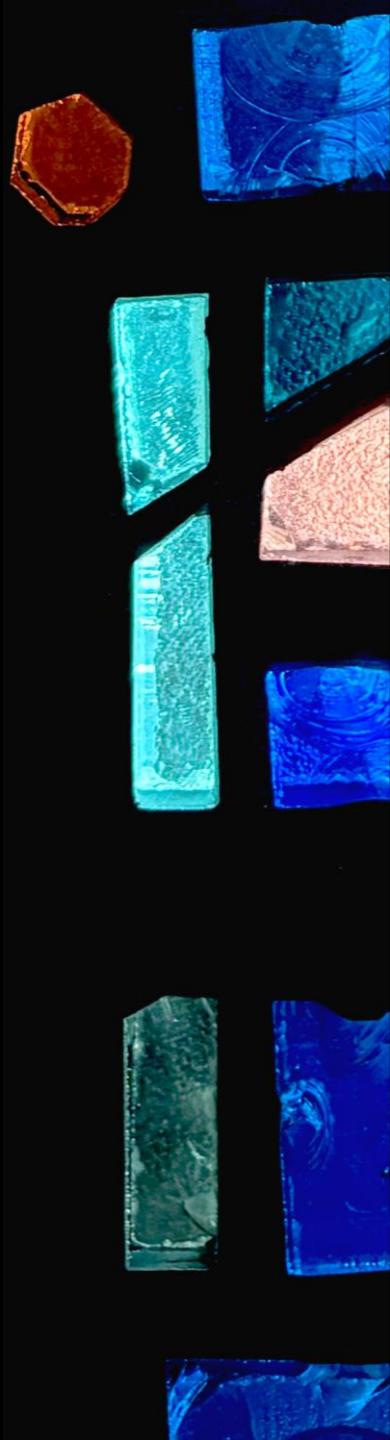


“Adapting the candid statement of Chief Justice Hughes [‘We are under a Constitution, but the Constitution is what the judge says it is’], today’s Roman Catholic might well put it thus: ‘We are under the Bible, but the Bible is what the Pope says it is.’ In fact, that’s exactly how things stand in practice. Functionally the Pope has become the highest governing authority in his church: *higher even than the Bible*. The church has been derailed by ‘ecclesial activism.’”

—James Anderson, “Ecclesial Activism”



**The true church is the church
where God's Word rules.**

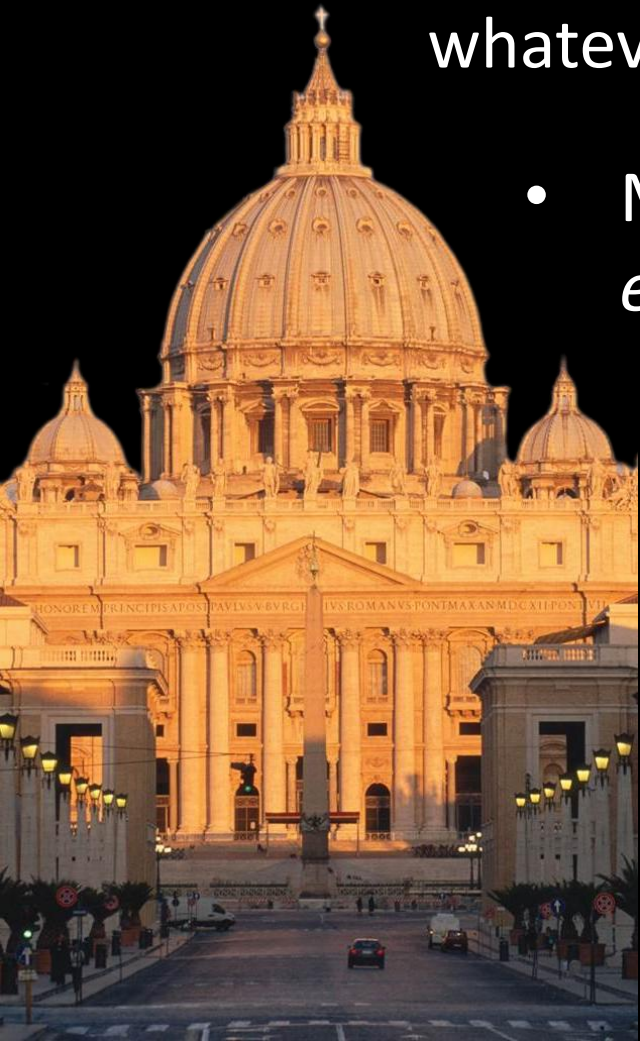


Ekklesia

I. THE WORD OF GOD MUST FORM THE CHURCH

Men *of the* Word

- The Roman Catholic essentially affirms that *the church* formed the Bible: “The Bible exists because the church has determined it so.”
 - Rome recognizes that this is a matter of *ultimate authority*; whatever is *first* in order has the *final say*.
 - Maintaining this position allows the RCC to engage in *ecclesial activism*—making the Bible say what it wants.
 - But “the church no more created the canon than Newton created the law of gravity; recognition is not creation” (J. I. Packer, *Truth and Power*, 68).
 - The true church acknowledges that the Christ builds His church through His Word; His Word is ultimate, and the church is subservient to it.



“It is not the church (or the people of God) that determines which books are inspired by God and are thereby Scripture. The writings themselves are vested with the authority of God on the basis of divine inspiration. They are the Word of God because they were written under the Spirit’s inspiration. The people of God (the church for the New Testament, Israel for the Old Testament) merely recognize the authority present within those writings.” —John MacArthur & Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 120



- This reality recognizes the necessity of the Word of God for *personal salvation*—for forming *believers*.
- **Romans 10:17** – “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”
- **James 1:18** – “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”
- **1 Peter 1:22–25** – “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. . . . And this is the word which was preached to you.”
- But God did not save sinners to remain isolated, individual entities; His Word also brought into existence *their gathering together—the church*.

- **Ephesians 2:19–20** – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.”
- **Acts 6:7** – “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”

The spread of *the Word of the Lord* =
the growth of *the Church of the Lord*

- **Acts 12:24** – “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”
- **Acts 19:20** – “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.”

- Since it is the Word of God that brings into existence the people of God, the people of God must be *defined* by this Word.
- How we must understand and assess the church can never be:
 - A matter of personal preference.
 - A matter of public opinion.
 - A matter of state jurisdiction.
 - A matter of evolving consensus.



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II. THE WORD OF GOD MUST FILL THE CHURCH

Men *of the* Word

- **Colossians 3:16** – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
 - **“The word of Christ”** – the apostolic message *about* Jesus Christ.
 - **“Let dwell”** – “to occupy as a permanent resident.”
 - **“Richly”** – not superficially but deeply, not temporarily but in a way that leads to lasting transformation.
 - **“Within you”** – emphasizes a *corporate experience*; it is a command *to the entire church*; the word of Christ is to dwell *in the church*.

“Paul is urging the community as a whole to put the message about Christ at the center of its corporate experience.”

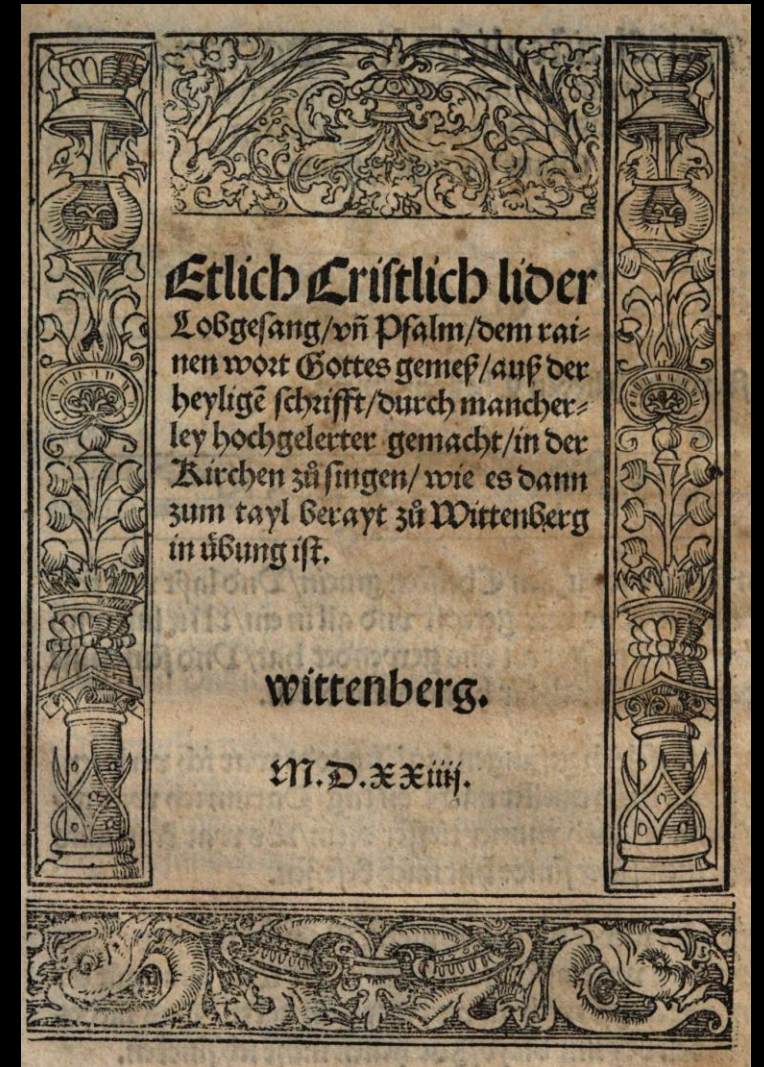
—Douglas Moo, *Colossians & Philemon*, 286

It is to be “not with a scanty foothold, but with a large and liberal occupancy.” —John Eadie, *Colossians*, 247

To allow this “word” to dwell richly within means the Colossian believers would do so “in their fellowship and in their hearts if they paid heed to what they heard, bowed to its authority, assimilated its lessons, and translated them into daily living.” —F. F. Bruce, *Colossians, Philemon, & Ephesians*, 158

“There is much to learn from this verse about how we should worship. However, let me lean into one primary principle regarding corporate singing: music in worship should be viewed as an extension of the ministry of the Word. Too often in many churches, preaching and music conflict. Our preaching and singing, however, should work together so that the Word of Christ dwells richly in the saints. For that matter, all that happens in our corporate gatherings should build up the Lord’s people through the ministry of the Word. When we teach, admonish, and sing to one another, the Word of Christ dwells in us more richly. These three elements, when practiced in the wisdom of Christ (Col 2:3), serve a specific purpose: mutual edification. Singing in worship is not a form of entertainment; it is a powerful tool for building one another up in Christlikeness.”

—H. B. Charles, Jr.



The title page of the first Lutheran hymnal, published in 1524.

- **1 Timothy 3:16** – “the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”
- **1 Timothy 4:13** – “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”
- **2 Timothy 4:1–4** – “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.”

“The first mark of a healthy church is expositional preaching. It is not only the first mark; it is far and away the most important of them all, because if you get this one right, all the others should follow. . . . If you establish the priority of the Word, then you have in place the single most important aspect of the church’s life, and growing health is virtually assured because God has decided to act by his Spirit through his Word.”

—Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 44



“Wherever we find the Word of God surely
preached and heard, and the sacraments
administered according to the institution of
Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a
church of God.”

—John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9



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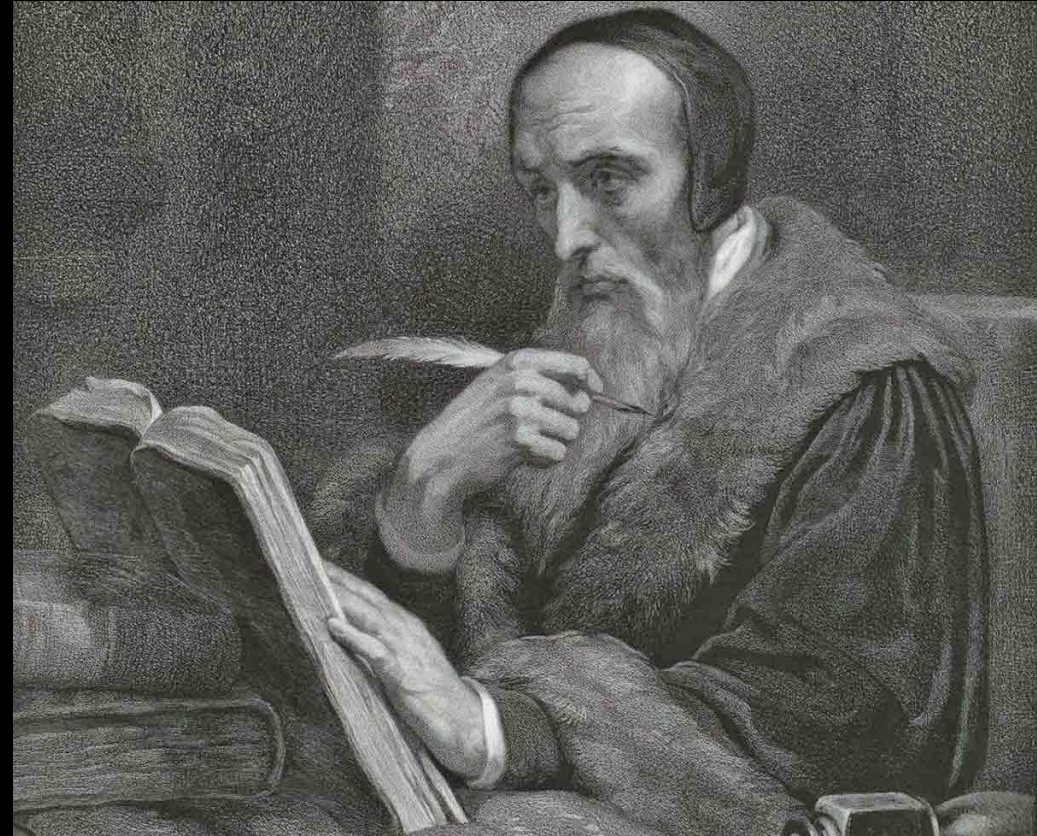
III. THE WORD OF GOD MUST GOVERN THE CHURCH

Men *of the Word*

- **“To govern”** – “to control and direct the making and administration of policy”; “to determine rules for and handle administration of an organization, group, etc.”
- **Ephesians 1:22–23** – “And He [the Father] put all things in subjection under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”
- Christ “governs” His church *through* the means of His Word, which He entrusted to the apostles.
- **1 Corinthians 14:37–38** – “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

- The governing role that Scripture is to play in the church was captured by the early church fathers, who began referring to the Old and New Testaments as “**the canon of truth**” or “**the rule of faith.**”
 - **κανὼν (*kanōn*)** = “measuring rod,” “rule,” “standard”—that which is used to judge other things.
- It was captured by the Reformers, in what was called “**the regulative principle of Scripture**” – that Scripture must “regulate” the practice of church life—particularly of its worship of God.

“We may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe. Therefore, if we would have Him approve our worship, this rule, which He everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed. . . . God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His word.” —John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 17–18



“It is unwarrantable and unlawful to introduce into the government and worship of the church anything which has not the positive sanction of Scripture. . . . Those who dislike this principle, from whatever cause, usually try to run us into difficulties by putting a very stringent conception upon it and thereby giving it an appearance of absurdity. [But] the principle must be interpreted and explained in the exercise of common sense.”

—William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 27, 32



- It was captured by the 17th cent. Latin phrase used by post-Reformation theologians when they identified the chief implication of *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”): ***norma normans non normata*** – “the norming norm that is not normed.”



“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered **strange fire** before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.” —**Leviticus 10:1–2**

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IV. THE WORD OF GOD MUST REFORM THE CHURCH

Men *of the* Word



- The churches of Revelation 2–3 tell us that the constant threat of drift is real; by the end of the 1st cent., Christ called on five of the seven churches of Asia Minor *to repent*.
- “Lapses into the deformity of misbelief and unbelief, ethical error and compromise, apathy and superstition, formality and dead routine, must be expected. So reformation, not only in the negative sense of purging abuses . . . but also in the positive sense of re-forming, or reshaping, through the giving of new scriptural substance to faith and life, will be our chronic need” (J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power*, 65).
- The ever-present need is captured in the 17th cent. Latin phrase, ***ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda verbi Dei*** – “the church is reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God.”

- Churches are continually being *formed*, then apart from vigilance become *deformed*, and then must be *reformed*.
- The instruments of *deformation* are careless and weak church leaders, the pressures of the culture, and the god of this world.
- Traditions and intentions may initially be “good,” but without constant subjection to Scripture quickly usurp the role which God’s Word alone can hold.
- In response, Christ commands, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).



“The church is always to be under the Word; she must be; we must keep her there. You must not assume that because the church started correctly, she will continue so. She did not do so in the New Testament times; she has not done so since. Without being constantly reformed by the Word the church becomes something very different. We must always keep the church under the Word.”

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *What Is an Evangelical?*, 30

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IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Men *of the* Word



1. Affirm the supreme authority of Scripture.
2. Conform your preferences to Scripture's standard.
3. Make your need for Scripture known.
4. Be more than a hearer of the Word; be a doer.



Ekklesia

Tonight's resources will be
posted on-line at
gracechurch.org/motw