



COVENANT
AFFIRMATIONS

CENTRAL COVENANT AFFIRMATIONS

The centrality of the word of God. The Covenant Church states its view of Scripture as follows: “the Holy Scripture, the Old and the New Testament, is the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.”² When Philipp Jakob Spener presented his proposals for the renewal of the church in 1675, his first concern was with the centrality of the word of God in the life of the congregation and of individual believers. He wrote:

Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the word of

² From the Preamble to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

God among us. We know that by nature we have no good in us. If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God. To this end the word of God is the powerful means, since faith must be enkindled through the gospel. . . . The more at home the word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits.³

What was new in Spener's proposal was not another doctrine of inspiration (there was general agreement on the divine inspiration of Scripture in his day), or a new recognition of the authority of Scripture. What was new was his recovery of the living nature of the word of God. The word is the "powerful means" to the creation of new life through the Holy Spirit. For many in Spener's day the word of God was simply information, or law, or rules; for Spener the word was power—power to effect change in the life of the hearer through the Holy Spirit.

The dynamic life-shaping power of the word of God has been at the heart of the Covenant Church since its founding. That life-changing word gave birth to the conventicles—the small groups that met for Bible study in confidence that the word would shape the life of the believer and the believing community. It provided the motive for private devotional reading of the Bible, a practice for which our forebears received the nickname "readers." It prompted the concern for faithful preaching, not of human opinion, but of the word of God, which has power to convict of sin and unrighteousness and kindle the desire for new life. This dynamic life-shaping power of the word leads us to affirm that both women and men are called to serve as ordained ministers. It is the reason we intentionally pursue ethnic diversity. It is the motivation behind every act of compassion and justice through the life of our shared ministry.

The Covenant Church believes that the effective power of the scriptural word is inseparably associated with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit never works independently of the word, and the word is made effective through the Holy Spirit.

The union of word and Spirit is a central theme in evangelical faith. It was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the written word came into being

³ Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) 87.

(2 Timothy 3:16). Through the Spirit the word of God does not return empty but accomplishes that for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11). It is through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit that the sinner who responds to the word is assured of being a child of God (Romans 8:16-17).

It is essential, then, to the life of the church that it be a company of people who desire their lives to be shaped by the powerful and living word of God. The alternative is clear. Not to be shaped by the word is to be shaped by the world.

On every side attractive and persuasive voices urge us toward conformity to the spirit of this age. There is no escaping from these pervasive influences. Only the church that hears and responds to the word will be able to be a prophetic voice in this wilderness and bring healing to a confused and troubled world.