

Calvary Basics

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 18 August 2010 05:14 - Last Updated Wednesday, 18 August 2010 08:10

The following, is a basic and brief overview of what Calvary Chapel believes and teaches.

Calvary Chapel began in the late 1960's as a small non-denominational church of 25 members pastored by Chuck Smith (see "The Philosophy of Ministry of Calvary Chapel"). Through Calvary Chapel, there have been numerous ministries that have been born via the Holy Spirit using men and women who desire to see the kingdom of God expanded upon this fading earth. For example, The Word for Today publishes Bible study books and tapes. CSN (Calvary Satellite Network) broadcasts God's Word over the nation. Calvary Chapel Bible College provides Biblical education to thousands at its home campus in Murrieta, California. Calvary Chapel Bible Extension campuses are being birthed in new locations around the globe. The list goes on and on! Praise God for His never ending work in the lives of His saints!

Because of the Lord's blessing, many people have asked exactly what does Calvary Chapel believe, what are its distinctives and what sets it apart from other Christian groups? Calvary Chapel is somewhat hesitant to address these topics in order to avoid division in the body of Christ. Christianity, according to Jesus, is to be known by its love. Yet the Bible does teach us to have sound doctrine. There are "essential" doctrines that are held in common amongst believers such as: the virgin birth of Jesus, His sinless life, death for our sins, bodily resurrection, ascension to glory and personal return to rule the earth to name a few. These are the essence of Christianity, and agreed upon by virtually all born again believers. When we move away from the essential doctrines to those that are less essential, we risk setting barriers up in the church, something we at Calvary Chapel have no desire to do. Still, Calvary Chapel is distinct from denominational churches and other Protestant groups and people desire to know what those distinctions are. This article is going to touch on highlights of those distinctions, yet for a more in-depth look, "Calvary Distinctives" by Chuck Smith would be the recommended reading.

The information contained here, is not to cause division or discord in the Body of Christ, conversely, we long for unity among God's people and we allow for a great deal of flexibility even within our own ranks. Calvary Chapel pastors are not clones who all believe exactly the same thing. Still, there are distinctives that make Calvary Chapel unique and which define our mission.

BALANCE In a broad general sense, Calvary Chapel is the middle ground between

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fundamentalism and Pentecostalism in modern Protestant theology. In fact, we believe that this is at least part of the reason why God has raised up this ministry.

Fundamentalism is that portion of Protestantism which holds to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, believing that they are divinely inspired and inerrant. Hence, the “fundamentals” of the faith are emphasized. Although the modern news media and the liberal church scorn fundamentalists as backwards and stupid, the truth is that fundamentalism has preserved the integrity of God’s Word and held on to the essential doctrines of the orthodox faith.

Pentecostalism as a modern movement grew out of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles at the turn of the 20th century, and spawned denominations that emphasize the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of spiritual and scriptural gifts of the Spirit which had fallen dormant in the main line churches. Often criticized by the liberal church and news media as being emotionally driven, Pentecostalism restored to the church the importance of gifts of the Spirit and the power of God for the believer today.

Over the years however, fundamentalism, while it clung to the integrity of God’s Word, tended to become rigid, legalistic and unaccepting of spiritual gifts. Similarly, Pentecostalism became enthusiastic and emotional at the expense of the teaching of God’s Word.

Calvary Chapel tries to have the balance between the two. At Calvary Chapel, we believe in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as mentioned in the Bible, and we encourage their exercise, but always “decently and in order”, with the primary emphasis on the Word of God which we look to as our standard of faith. Because of this balance, Calvary Chapel services are designed to be centered around the verse by verse teaching of God’s Word, and special “after glow” services are provided where the gifts of the Holy Spirit can operate freely under the leadership of mature Christians. Many Pentecostals think Calvary Chapel is not emotional enough, and many fundamentalists think Calvary Chapel is too emotional. With those views, Calvary is probably on the right path towards balance.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT Calvary Chapel also differs from most mainline churches in its style of church government. Most denominational churches maintain either a congregational form of church government, a Presbyterian form, or an Episcopal form of running their churches. These three terms should not be confused with the denominations that bear the same names because other churches of different names share the same styles of government.

The congregational form of church government is an American invention and appeals to our American sense of democracy. Basically, the congregation as a whole makes all decisions in these churches by voting on matters of importance and appointing committees from its ranks to

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run the daily operation of the church. Most Congregational, Baptist, Pentecostal, Brethren, and non-denominational churches are organized in this fashion. The congregation votes on hiring a pastor, votes on how to spend the money and on anything else of importance. Although democratic people like the idea, congregational forms of church government often wind up at best causing the pastor to be directed by the sheep he is supposed to lead, and at worst reducing the pastor to a hireling.

The Episcopal form of church government, used by Episcopalian, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox and Methodist churches (to name a few) is controlled by a church hierarchy which may have differing names. Basically, there is a bishop, or someone of similar stature, who oversees the churches, appoints pastors to pulpits, sets policy, and guides the vision of the local congregations. Unfortunately, this style of government, which grew out of European monarchies, leaves little freedom for the local pastor or congregation to follow the leading of the Spirit.

The Presbyterian form of church government, which is typical in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, puts the decisions of church government in the hands of a select group of elders (the "presbytery") who are appointed in various different ways, depending on the church. These elders are over the pastor, who in turn is over the congregation. The problem here too is that this system puts the God appointed leader, the pastor, under some of those he is supposed to lead.

Calvary Chapels are organized differently. Church government at Calvary Chapel is very simple, not a complex bureaucracy; committees and sub-committees are essentially non-existent. Basically, at Calvary Chapel we believe that the pastor is responsible for the church, responsible to hear from God and responsible to feed and love His people faithfully. Elders are appointed in the larger churches to help the pastor care for the spiritual needs of the congregation, as are deacons to help the pastor care for the material needs of the church.

In addition, our churches have church boards as required by most states which vary in size depending on the size of the church, and which usually are made up of mature Christian businessmen who can advise the pastor with respect to the business operations and decisions of the church such as property management and investments. At Calvary Chapel, church organization is de-emphasized, and only the organization that is needed to run the church is instituted. The pastor guides the church as he is led by the Holy Spirit, and we trust God to put pastors where He wants them to be.

DOCTRINE At Calvary Chapel we believe in all the fundamental doctrines of the evangelical Protestant church. For example, we believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, that the Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the inspired, infallible Word of God.

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We believe that God is eternally existent in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that God the Father is the personal, transcendent and sovereign Creator of all things.

We believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His vicarious death on the Cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

After He ascended to Heaven, Jesus poured out His Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfill His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.

We believe that all people are by nature separated from God and responsible for their own sin, but that salvation, redemption, and forgiveness of sin are freely offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a person repents of sin and accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, trusting Him to save, that person is immediately born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit, all his / her sins are forgiven, and that person becomes a child of God, destined to spend eternity with the Lord.

As we previously mentioned, we believe in the proper Scriptural exercise of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, the greatest gift of all being God's love.

At Calvary Chapel, we await the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Calvary Chapel is strongly committed to a belief that the church will be raptured before the seven year tribulation period described in Revelation chapter 6 through 18. We recognize that other believers hold a different view, but this is the way we see the Scripture's teaching on this subject.

We believe that the second coming of Jesus Christ with His saints to rule on the earth will be personal, pre-millennial and visible. This motivates us to heart-felt worship, committed service, diligent study of God's Word, regular fellowship with other Christians and participation in both adult baptism by immersion and in Holy Communion.

Calvary Chapel rejects the teaching of "amillennialism" which spiritualizes Scripture and denies the literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on the earth as described in Revelation chapter 20.

WHAT WE DO NOT BELIEVE At Calvary Chapel, we reject some popular doctrines of some Christian groups because we believe them to be in error scripturally. This does not mean that we will not fellowship with those holding these views; it simply means that such views are

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outside the boundaries of what constitutes a Calvary Chapel church.

For example, we reject, as we have already mentioned, “amillennialism”, post-millennialism, as well as a mid or Post-tribulation rapture view. At Calvary Chapel, we are strongly pre-millennialists and pre-tribulation rapturists.

We also reject the belief, held by some Pentecostals and charismatics, that Christians can be demon possessed. The Scripture says “greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world” which makes no sense if a believer can be simultaneously indwelt by both the Holy Spirit and evil spirits. Christians can be attacked by demons, but they cannot be possessed or controlled by them.

In addition, we reject “5-point Calvinism”. Calvary Chapel rejects two of the five points of five point Calvinism. First, Calvinism teaches that Jesus’ atonement on the Cross was limited, that is, that He died only for a chosen group, His “elect”, not for the sins of the entire world. At Calvary Chapel, we believe that Jesus died on the Cross for all the sins of all people, and that anyone who wants to can accept Him as Lord and Savior and be born again. Strict five point Calvinists believe that only the elect can be saved and that God has elected others to spend eternity in hell.

Secondly, we reject the Calvinistic teaching called “irresistible grace”, which is the belief that man cannot, even if he wants to, resist the wooing and calling of God to salvation. Instead, at Calvary Chapel, we believe that man has a free will and he can resist the call of God if he chooses to do so. Therefore, those who hold to five point Calvinism are outside of the borders of what defines Calvary Chapel.

At Calvary Chapel, we also reject the teaching of “positive confession” which is the doctrine put forth by the faith movement teachers that says that we as human beings can have unlimited health and wealth because we, like God, have the ability to create our own reality by the confession of our lips. These people teach that if a person will confess health and wealth consistently, then that is what they will have, and, conversely, the Christian living in sickness and poverty is settling for less than his full inheritance in Christ. At Calvary Chapel, we believe that many believers both in the Bible and in daily life are often afflicted not because their confession is wrong, but simply because we live in a foreign world. We believe that the health and prosperity doctrine is a perversion of Scripture and is often used to fleece the flock of God. We do not believe that God can be commanded by man to heal or provide, but that we must always submit to His perfect will, even in affliction.

Additionally, we reject the teaching that uses human prophecy to supersede the Word of God. There are some Christian groups around which claim to have prophets and apostles of equal validity with those who wrote the Bible. Moreover, they claim that the prophetic utterances from these people take precedence over the Word of God. At Calvary Chapel, we believe that the Bible is the final authority and the complete Word of God for His church today, and that no prophecy or teaching can ever supersede it.

Some churches have incorporated human secular psychology and philosophy into their

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teaching programs, creating sermons that are more based on secular humanistic theory than on the Word of God. While we respect our fellow believers who work in the mental health related fields, we at Calvary Chapel believe that the central mission of the church is to proclaim God's Word to a lost and hurting world. Moreover, it has been our experience that humanistic psychology and philosophy often do more harm than good, and people respond best when God's Word is proclaimed in the power and love of the Holy Spirit. It is God's Word that changes lives for the better. This is not to imply that we object to the work of the many dedicated Christian mental health professionals; conversely, we thank God for them. Our point is simple that in our church services, we emphasize the teaching of God's Word.

And finally, as we have mentioned before, Calvary Chapel rejects the over-emphasis of spiritual gifts and experiential signs and wonders to the exclusion of Biblical teaching. Again, we are a Bible based ministry that avoids programs and gimmicks in favor of the simple teaching of the Word of God in love to His people. In our services, we focus on a personal relationship with God through worship, prayer and the teaching of the Word of God. We offer both expository and topical studies; we do not allow speaking in tongues loudly during services because we do not believe that the Holy Spirit would interrupt Himself. **WORSHIP** Many people are under the impression that a particular style of worship is insisted upon at Calvary Chapel, that style being the soft contemporary sound made popular by Maranatha! Music and by Asaph Records (which both originated at Calvary Chapel). Although most Calvary Chapels do utilize a form of contemporary worship, there is actually a great variety of styles of music found in our churches. Some are very traditional and conservative, with organs or pianos and hymns, while others prefer electric guitars and drums. There is no set style of worship that makes a Calvary Chapel unique; instead there is wide latitude in expression. All of us desire, of course, that whatever the style of worship, that it come from our hearts.

Similarly, some of the worship services at Calvary Chapels are quite traditional, while others are more contemporary. Some of our churches are filled with elderly people in suits and ties, some are filled with young people in jeans and tee shirts, and many are a combination of all different ages, styles, and races of folks who come together with one common focus: love for Jesus Christ and the desire to know Him more intimately.

STATEMENT OF FAITH To better help people not familiar with the Calvary Chapel ministries understand who we are, we at Calvary Chapel's Bible College developed the following statement of faith, most of which was written by, and all of which was approved by Pastor Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, pastor of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and President of the Bible College.

Calvary Chapel has been formed as a fellowship of believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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Our supreme desire is to know Christ and be conformed to His image by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not a denominational church, nor are we opposed to denominations as such, only to their over-emphasis of the doctrinal differences that have led to the division of the Body of Christ.

We believe the only true basis of Christian fellowship is Christ's (Agape') love, which is greater than any differences we possess, and without which we have no right to claim ourselves Christians.

We believe worship of God should be spiritual. Therefore, we remain flexible and yielded to the leading of the Holy Spirit to direct our worship.

We believe worship of God should be inspirational. Therefore, we give great place to music in our worship.

We believe worship of God should be intelligent. Therefore, our services are designed with great emphasis upon the teaching of the Word of God that He might instruct us how He should be worshipped.

We believe worship of God should be fruitful. Therefore, we look for His love in our lives as the supreme manifestation that we have been truly worshipping Him.

We believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, that the Bible, Old and New Testaments, in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God, a complete and final written revelation of God.

We believe in one personal, transcendent, and holy God, the creator of all, Who is eternal, and Who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a man for the suffering of death, that He is the promised Messiah, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, provided for that atonement of our sins by His vicarious death on the Cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

After Jesus ascended to Heaven, He poured out His Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfill His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.

We believe that all people are by nature separated from God and responsible for their own sin, but that salvation, redemption and forgiveness are freely offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a person repents of sin and accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, trusting Him to save, that person is immediately born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit, all his / her sins are forgiven, and that person becomes a child of God.

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit who indwells, seals and empowers every

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believer, baptizing them into the Body of Christ. We further believe that the Holy Spirit will come upon any believer who asks in faith, enabling him / her to preach the Gospel in power. We also believe all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Scriptures are valid for today if they are exercised within the scriptural guidelines. We believe that love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.

We believe Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, His church, and that church government should be simplistic rather than a complex bureaucracy. We desire to be led by the Holy Spirit in all the functions and directions of the ministry of the church.

We await the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, and we believe that the second coming of Christ with His saints to rule on the earth will be personal, pre-millennial and visible. This motivates us to holy living, heartfelt worship, committed service, diligent study of God's Word, regular fellowship and participation in baptism by immersion and in Holy Communion.

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its message can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.

We reject doctrinal view points or spiritual phenomena which are based solely on experience. We look to the Word of God for the basis of all our faith and practice.

We believe in a personal devil called Satan who, along with all his evil angels, called demons, is destined to spend eternity in hell, and who now seeks to deceive the believers and defeat the work of God, but who can be resisted by believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, protected by God and interceded for by Jesus Christ our Lord.

We believe that the nation of Israel has a special place in God's plan and that all the promises of God to Israel will be fulfilled. **CONCLUSION**

By clarifying some of what we believe at Calvary Chapel, our purpose has been simply to help others less familiar with the movement, gain insight into who we are. It has not been our intention to say that we are right and everyone else is wrong, nor has it been our intention to argue our position with any Christian believer. We are content to agree to disagree, and we desire to have nothing but love and fellowship with anyone who calls on the name of our Lord in truth and sincerity.

While there are many additional areas of policy and doctrine we could discuss, and while we could write volumes in an effort to defend all our positions against other positions, this is not our desire. Our desire is to simply adore Jesus, and we invite all God's people to join us as we do so. The Internet holds a list of affiliated Calvary's under CalvaryChapel.com.

While many different kinds of people attend and pastor Calvary Chapel affiliated churches, all of the Calvary Chapel leadership agrees on the essential elements of this article, although their

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individual styles of ministry, methods of preaching and visions for outreach vary greatly.

As an individual member in the Lord Jesus Christ, we welcome you to our churches and Bible College programs regardless of your background or doctrinal position. We seek the unity of the Spirit in a bond of peace and love. We believe that God has called us to a unique ministry that fulfills His special purpose in this generation. May God bless you as you seek to draw near to Him in love.

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" 2 Peter 3:18