

6. the Priority of the Word

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith emphasizes the necessity of expositional preaching to convey the whole counsel of God and foster spiritual growth within the congregation.

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:8, Isaiah 28:13, Daniel 12:3, Matthew 13:8, Acts 20:27, 1 Timothy 4:13

Topics: "The Importance of Scripture", "Expositional Preaching"

Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes the importance of prioritizing the Word of God in preaching, advocating for a systematic approach to teaching the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. He argues that this method allows pastors to declare the whole counsel of God, addressing both inspiring and difficult topics without bias. Smith highlights the need for patience in ministry, as true growth and understanding of God's Word take time, contrasting it with the fleeting success of flashy ministries. He encourages a commitment to expositional preaching, where the focus is on reading, understanding, and applying Scripture. Ultimately, he reminds the congregation that lasting fruit comes from a deep and consistent engagement with God's Word.

Transcript

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

1 Timothy 4:13

Another primary distinctive of Calvary Chapel is our endeavor to declare to people the whole counsel of God. We see this principle illustrated when Paul met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. As they were on the shore of the Aegean at Miletus, around the coastal area of Ephesus, Paul said that he was innocent of the blood of all men, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27).

Now, how is it possible for a person to claim to have declared, 'the whole counsel of God?' The only way a person could make that claim to his congregation would be if he taught through the whole Word of God with them, from Genesis to Revelation. Once you've taken your congregation through the Bible, then you can say to them, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

This can't be done with topical sermons. Topical sermons are good, and they have their place, but when you're preaching topically, you're prone by nature to preach only those topics that you like. And there are topics in the Bible that aren't very inspiring. They don't excite the people, but they are necessary issues

that have to be dealt with. The human tendency, however, is to avoid these. If you're only preaching topically, you may also tend to avoid controversial or difficult topics, and the people won't gain a well-balanced view of God's truth. So the value of going straight through the Bible is that you can say, "I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God."

Now, I believe that I can say to the people at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, "I have declared unto you the whole counsel of God," because we have taken them from Genesis to Revelation seven times. We're currently beginning the eighth round. We don't skip anything. And that's why in the majority of the Calvary Chapels, and the most successful ones, you'll find the systematic teaching of the entire Word of God, going through the Bible from cover to cover.

For the most part, the teaching ministry of Calvary Chapel is expositional in style. It doesn't mean that on occasion we don't address a particular topic or give topical messages. We're not saying that topical messages are wrong or evil. They have their place. We don't want to fall into strict legalism where we analyze every sermon to see if it was homiletically correct and expositionally presented. But, for the most part, we seek to follow the example of Isaiah who said, "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little;" (Isaiah 28:13). These verses are describing the people's reaction to Isaiah's style of teaching.

They were making fun of his method, but it was an effective method. They were complaining about him, mockingly saying that he ought go back and teach the kindergartners because his teaching was "precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." They said these words in derision. Yet, it's so important to take the people through the Word, line upon line, precept by precept. When we do, we are delivering to them the whole counsel of God.

Another advantage of teaching the whole counsel of God is that when you come to difficult issues that deal with problems in an individual's life or within the Church body, you can address them straightforwardly. We need not worry about people thinking, "Oh, he's aiming at me today." People in the congregation know that it's simply the passage of Scripture being studied that day. So it can't be, "Oh man, he's really picking on me," because they realize that you're going straight through the Book, and you're not jumping from topic to topic. We're just going straight through the entire Word of God.

In Nehemiah chapter 8 verse 8, when the children of Israel had returned from captivity and were rebuilding the city, the leadership gathered the people together and constructed a little platform. They began in the early morning to read the Word of God to the people. Nehemiah 8:8 declares, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

I believe this is a worthy definition of expositional preaching - to read the Word, give the sense, and cause the people to understand the meaning. I have found that many times I really don't begin to grasp the meaning until I have read a particular passage maybe 50 or 60 times. Suddenly it begins to come together in my own mind. I believe it's valuable to use good commentaries to help in understanding the meaning of a passage. I appreciate the insights God has given to other men on passages of the Word. But in saying that I appreciate and do read commentaries, I must also confess that often I will read pages and pages from commentaries and get absolutely nothing that I can use. Sometimes when you read seven commentaries on a particular passage, you're more confused when you're through than when you started, because there are so many different concepts or ideas on a particular passage. So I believe that one of the best commentaries on the Bible is the Bible itself.

It is important to remember that we don't generally see immediate or spectacular overnight results in a Calvary Chapel. It takes time to whet and develop the appetite of the people for the Word of God. It takes time for them to grow. For most Calvary Chapels that are planted in a new area, it takes a couple of years to lay the foundation, prepare the ground, plow the hardened soil, work the soil, and plant the seed in the fertile soil. Then you have to wait. The seed doesn't bear fruit overnight. The seed has to grow and to develop. But, eventually, it begins to bear fruit.

Most of the fellows that I have observed have gone out and by the end of the second year, they've hit the crisis point. They're usually discouraged. They feel it isn't going to happen where they are. They start believing that the people there are different from other people, and that it's just not going to happen. You'd be amazed at how many have gone out, and after two years have called me up saying they were going to be leaving because it just wasn't happening. I'll encourage them to stay for just another six months or so, telling them, "Look, you've come through the hard part. You've been through the plowing. You've been through the cultivating of the soil. You've been through the planting. Now wait and watch and see if any fruit will come forth." As a general rule, it's in the third year that you begin to see fruit as a result of planting the Word of God in the hearts of the people. "The seed that falls on good soil will bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold," (Matthew 13:8). But it doesn't happen overnight.

This can be rather discouraging when there are those who come in with a flash and a fire, and seem to generate an immediate crowd. People are thronging to see the miracles, to watch the fireworks, and here you are just plodding along. You can't see much development or growth, and these other guys seem to have instant success. But as the Lord said to Daniel, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3).

On the Fourth of July it's fun to watch the fireworks, the sky rockets, the blazes of glory, and all the color filling the sky. Everybody is "oohing and aahing," but it only lasts for a short time. Before you know it, it's just ashes. It's a big flash, and then it's all over. That's the way many ministries are, just a big flash and then it's over. You have to determine which sky you want to shine in. Do you want to shine as a star for ever and ever? Or do you want to be like a sky rocket with a sudden flash, coming on the scene dramatically, but with no staying power?

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