

Chosen Vessel - Calvary Chapel's Method of Teaching

by Chuck Smith

The Calvary Chapel distinctive is teaching the Bible by going straight through a book of the Bible from start to finish, giving a well-rounded view of the Bible and leading people into a deeper understanding of God's Word.

Duration: 42:05

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Matthew 7:7, Romans 8:9, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 2:12, 2 Timothy 3:16, James 1:22

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sitting and learning before walking in the Christian faith. He explains that believers are seated together with Christ and have been given the Holy Spirit, which provides them with power and blessings. The speaker encourages a systematic approach to studying the Bible, suggesting that churches should have a congregational plan of Bible reading and that sermons should be based on the portion of the Bible read that week. He warns against the temptation to focus on attractive sermons that deal with popular topics, instead emphasizing the need for a well-balanced spiritual diet.

Transcript

This conference, we wanted to sort of articulate what we feel to be the Calvary Chapel distinctive. What makes a Calvary Chapel a Calvary Chapel? Sort of identifying what are the distinctives of the Calvary Chapels so that you can perhaps ascertain whether or not you are a Calvary Chapel or if you want to be. We believe that every church really has a need of certain distinctives to justify their existence.

If you're just exactly like a church down the street and you're both struggling, it's better to merge and have one stronger church than two struggling churches. And as we define the Calvary Chapel distinctives, it isn't with any kind of a thought that we are right and the rest are wrong. It is just this is what we are.

And these are the things that sort of identify what we are and what we are seeking to be. It isn't in any wise putting down any other denomination or any other church or any other style of ministry. Certainly God has allowed for a great variety and I'm thankful for that variety.

If every one of us looked exactly alike, how would you know your wife? So God has created marvelous variety and we appreciate that. And within the church there is variety because not everybody is alike. And

if you haven't learned by now, you will learn in time that you cannot minister to everybody.

There are people that are spiritually incompatible with you and try as you may you're not going to please them. And so you'll discover that sooner or later as you go on in the ministry. I discovered it sooner.

But there are people to whom you are very spiritually compatible and they come in and you're exactly what they are desiring, what they are looking for. And so in the broad spectrum of God's provision for people to know Him and to worship Him, from the extreme liturgical kind of a church to the extreme Pentecostal variety, you have this broad spectrum. And we're going to try to show you in that spectrum where we see that Calvary Chapel fits and try to define for you that place in this spectrum of ministry to the broad spectrum of types of people that exist in the world.

So as we get into these various sessions, that is going to be what we will be keying in on. The Calvary Chapel distinctive. Mine to start with is the distinctive of the teaching of the Word of God.

Now if you ask almost any pastor across the country if he teaches the Bible in his church, his answer of course would be, yes of course we teach the Bible. What else? So what makes us different from the other churches that also teach the Bible? Well there are a lot of churches, and in fact I would venture to say the majority of the churches that teach from the Bible, whereas we seek to teach the Bible. You say, well what's the difference? Well teaching from the Bible, you take a topic and you find a text and you develop that topic using scriptures from all over the Bible to help develop the topic that you are speaking on.

You get books such as Nath's Topical Bible, or Monser's Topical Index and Digest of the Bible, and you find that they have laid out the topics in a very excellent order. In fact when I was in Bible college we had one of the professors in our pastoral theology class who told us that he was going to share with us the secret that was followed by the majority of the pastors within the denomination for where you get your sermons, and he said it's Nath's Topical Bible. And you go in and it's true Nath has about a thousand or so topics that are found in the Bible, and they're all laid out, and the scriptures for the topics, and so you've got a thousand messages that you can preach from as you deal with different topics in the Bible.

Because the Bible does deal with a wide variety of topics, and you can find that wide variety helpful. I mean Nath's will give you a lot of help in finding those various topics. But with topical preaching there is of course that tendency of writing a favorite hobby that you might have.

There are many ministries that have a distinctive of just divine healing, or a distinctive of the Holy Spirit, or a distinctive of eternal security. And whenever they preach, they've got to deal with that distinctive. And so you get a very limited concept of the Bible because you're always dealing in a narrow, narrow spectrum of the broad truth that exists within the Bible.

Another weakness that I observe with this kind of teaching is that the people, the congregation, are never really encouraged in reading the Bible. And thus only in a broad sense, well we all ought to read the Bible, and we all ought to be reading the Bible and learning what the Bible says. But that's a broad kind of a general part of the topic.

When I teach on the importance of the Bible or whatever, then we all should be reading the Bible. But they are not consistently being encouraged to read the Bible through in a consistent fashion. And thus as the result, the people are very uneducated as far as what the Bible actually teaches.

They never know what topic is going to be addressed next Sunday or where the text might be. And your text can be randomly chosen anywhere from Genesis to Revelation. And when the people get there, they find that they're being popped all over the Bible week by week and never have any kind of a consistency in the study.

Whereas teaching the Bible, as we would define it, is to go consistently through a book of the Bible, teaching on every scripture within that book. If you do, eventually you will cover all of the topics that are in the Bible because you will go through the entire Bible and thus you won't miss anything. You won't be riding any special loves or hobby horses.

It keeps you from harping on one particular favorite subject of yours. And also in the same token, it forces you to deal with subjects that are unpopular to you and maybe unpopular to the congregation. And as the result, you have a tendency to just leave those subjects alone because you don't particularly care for that subject and you have a tendency just to then forsake it.

But yet all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable and is necessary for our growth and for our development. And even those subjects that are unpopular to you are necessary for your congregation and therefore in going through the Bible or through a book of the Bible, you are forced to take every passage and deal with it and thus the people get a well-rounded view of the Bible. And it also spares you being accused of pointing your sermon.

Ever been accused of that? Where people feel that someone told you about them and so your topic, you know, you were aiming at them, you know, every time you look their direction, they knew that you knew what they had been doing because you were pointing the sermon at them. But if you're going straight through a book of the Bible, hey, that's just the verse we're on this week. If it tough, you know, if the shoe fits, wear it.

But they can't really accuse you of pointing at them in the message. Not only that, you're always dealing with the text within the framework of the context. Do you know that all heresy and false doctrine is biblically based? They can give you chapter and verse.

But as the general rule, there is a resting of the text from the context. And in the reading of the scripture within its context, the heresy is dispelled. But those who are into heretical doctrine cannot and do not teach straight through a book of the Bible because you can't remain in heresy long and just continue to teach straight through the Bible.

There are the omissions of text. There are omissions of passages when you're trying to a heresy or false doctrine. For instance, there are those who emphasize the importance of works for righteousness, and they are pushing people into good works and the necessity of your witnessing or reading the Bible or tithing or whatever as a basis for your righteousness.

And they will quote to you Philippians 2.12, for the scripture says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Good proof text in order to show people that they've got to work out their own salvation. And God has required that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

Read on, brother, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, puts a whole different light on it. It brings it back into a true biblical perspective. But by just taking a portion of a scripture out of its context, you can make it mean almost anything.

And that's one of the dangers of topical preaching. It's taking a scripture quite often out of its context and giving to it an entirely different meaning than what you find the scripture is actually saying when you see it within its context. And so by going straight through a book, you are not taking scripture out of context, but you're always dealing with the scripture within the context.

Now, if you are reading any kind of a book, if I give you the book war and peace to read, and I say, this is a great book, you really need to understand and comprehend this book, you'll find that it's extremely helpful. If you would just each day sort of open the book randomly and read a few lines, do you think you would ever come to the understanding of what that book is all about? How do you understand a book? You usually start with a foreword, the preface, find out what the guy is wanting to say. And then you read it through from the beginning to the end in order that you might grasp what is in the author's mind.

When you get a letter from someone, how do you read the letter? Say it's a seven page letter that some friend has sent to you. Do you just sort of flip open the letter randomly and then just start reading a couple of lines to find out what he has to say, what's going on in his life? No, you start at the beginning of the letter and from the dear John to the yours truly, and you read it straight through. Now, many of these books in the Bible are letters, and yet we treat them in a very strange way if we seek to really understand what the letter is all about and what the letter is saying.

And you should start at the beginning of the letter and read it through. Going straight through the book, you don't miss anything, but you get the full counsel of God. Your people are getting a well-balanced meal.

If a person only ate hot fudge sundaes, he may be fat and happy, but he's not going to be healthy. You need the vegetables. You need the fruit.

You need the meat and potatoes. It isn't just all dessert. But unfortunately, where there is that desire to attract people by attractive sermons, where you are trying to deal with popular topics and dress them all up with a lot of psychology and a lot of humor and all so that people will say, oh, isn't that guy a crack up? Then you are giving the people just the whipped cream, the hot fudge sundae, something that is very exciting to their taste buds, to their appetites, but you're not developing strong believers.

And so it is necessary to go straight through the book in order that they might get the true balance and get both sides of the issue. You see, with truth, many times it is multifaceted, and usually at least there are two sides to any truth. And if we are only emphasizing one side of the truth, we are really in error.

You have to give them balanced truth. There is the truth of the sovereignty of God. He is sovereign.

There is no denying that truth. But if you only emphasize the sovereignty of God, and you never deal with the human responsibility of man, you are not giving the people the whole truth because the sovereignty of God is balanced by the human responsibility that God requires of man. And thus you have the balanced truth.

Aptly illustrated in the book of Ephesians, where the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians is dealing with basically what God has done for us. As in verse three, Paul sort of prefaces the whole thing by saying, thanks be unto God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ in heavenly places. And for the next three chapters, he goes on to show you all of these glorious spiritual blessings that we have in Christ in heavenly places.

Then having dealt with that, he then begins chapter four by saying, now walk worthy of that calling wherewith you were called. And he shows us how we're to walk in love, we're to walk in faith, we're to walk in truth, and he deals with how we are now to respond to what God has done. And you get the human responsibility, how we're to walk in relationship to our wives, to our children, to our employees, or to our masters, whatever the case may be.

And thus, you get the balance. Now, so often, when a person is stressing the believer's walk, and you want to deal with the believer's walk, a person will jump right into Ephesians four, or Ephesians five, or the first part of Ephesians six. So that they can show where and how we are to walk.

Here the scripture says, but if you don't start with the base of Ephesians one through three, they have no basis for their walk. They don't know how to sit. How can they walk without learning first how to sit? And in the first three chapters, he tells you how you are seated together with Christ, how that God has given you the Holy Spirit, and how that these things are there--that power that is there from God available to you, and the blessings that God has bestowed in order that you might walk.

So if you have that, you know, kind of mentality of, you know, what am I going to preach on this next Sunday? And you say, well, I preach very biblically. I believe in seek and ye shall find. And you start seeking for a text through the whole bible.

You're going to get that text out of its context, and you're going to get it out of its position within the epistle, or within the book. And thus, it's important to just take a book from the beginning to the end. Go straight through.

Then as you come to these issues, you're coming to them in a balanced position. Because if you're trying to get your people to walk the straight walk, and the walk in the Spirit and all, and they don't know what is there, what God has done, and the resources that God has made available for their walk, they're going to get frustrated. They're going to get discouraged.

They're going to try to walk without the equipment. And thus, so important to just go through the books of the Bible. And one of the Calvary Chapel distinctives is just going straight through the books, and teaching straight through a book in the Bible.

We've taken that a little bit further, in that we go straight through the Bible, book by book. And God has blessed it. Now, that isn't original with me.

In fact, I have to confess, I borrowed that idea. I was discouraged with the ministry and what was happening in the ministry. I wasn't happy with what I was seeing.

And so I picked up many, many years ago, well, you see, this is Halley's Bible Pocket of Ham book, and this is just a gold mine of nuggets of truth. And I've always told the new believer, after you get a Bible, get Halley's first. The first book after your Bible, Halley's Bible Pocket of Ham book.

In fact, I made a practice, because we didn't have many converts in those days, I made a practice of giving every new convert a Halley's Bible Pocket of Ham book. I just made that a practice. And so what I would do is I would give them my old copy out of my library.

I want to give you a book out of my library. And they're very magnanimous if you give it out of your library, you know, they, oh my, this is out of Chuck's library. And then I'd go buy me a brand new one.

So I always had a new Halley's Bible Ham book. So several years ago, when I bought my new copy, because I'd given my old one away, I noticed that on the cover, it had a little notation there, the most important page in this book is 814. Now, it was a revised, new revised Halley's, and I'd always loved Halley's, I'd always gotten so much out of it.

I thought that guy is so sharp. I wonder what he thinks the most important thing in this book is, because I found a lot of important things in this book. So I turned to page 814.

I read the most important thing in this book is this simple suggestion, that each church have a congregational plan of Bible reading and that the pastor's sermon be from the part of the Bible read the past week. I thought, hey, that's good. I like that.

Thus connecting the pastor's preaching with the people's Bible reading. This suggestion, if followed, would beyond any doubt, whatever, produce a revitalized church, provided the pastor himself thoroughly believes in the Bible as God's word and puts his heart into the effort. The church and the Bible go together.

The church exists to proclaim and exalt the Christ of the Bible and for nothing else. A church that does not enthrone the Bible in the lives of its people is false to its mission. The Bible is not just sort of a text or pretext book for preachers and teachers.

It is a book for the people, all the people, and the preachers and teachers who build on any other foundation must not be surprised if their work in the end proves to be very superficial. With all of our facilities for propagating Christian truth, our well-organized churches and Bible schools, our seminaries, our highly trained ministers and church leaders with the last word in up-to-date religious education methods, an endless amount of Christian literature, and an ever-increasing number of meetings and organizations where we talk and teach and preach in the name of the Bible, even quoting chapter and verse, yet the great body of our church members treat the Bible as if it were a mere side issue in their lives. They're willing, provided enough promotional pressure is put on them, to listen to preachers and leaders talk about Bible things.

But as for reading it themselves, only a few do it. Of a hundred average church members, perhaps one may even know the names of the Bible books or have any idea of what each book is about. Probably more than three-fourths of our American Protestant church members could not offhand tell where to find the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments.

And on top of this ignorance of the Bible and indifference to it and neglect of it, they have no great sense of loyalty to the church or conscience about it. On the average, less than one-third or one-fourth of a congregation's enrolled, professed membership attend its Sunday services with any degree of regularity. What a fearful indictment of prevailing techniques of doing church work.

It is not something sadly lacking in methods that we're producing churches that are so largely of the Laodicean type, indifferent, half-hearted, lukewarm, disloyal, and worldly-minded, or the Sardis type, in which there are only a few who have not defiled their garments. I marvel that church people are so indifferent to and neglectful of the book that tells them about their Savior. But I marvel more that the church leaders are doing so little about it.

Unquestionably, the most fatal weakness in the present-day church is the lack of leadership in the pulpit on this one point of guiding and leading its people into one habit, and that is the source and the basis of everything that the church exists to accomplish in its people. I do not wonder that so-called modernist preachers, holding the view of the Bible that they hold, show no interest in getting their people to be Bible readers. Rather, like fifth columnists undermining the Christian faith from within, their delight seems to be in blue-penciling the Scripture, and these words are not addressed to them.

But what puzzles me is that our conservative preachers who proclaim with militant vehemence their faith in the Bible as God's Word and exhaust their vocabulary in exalting and glorifying the Bible show so little concern about their people reading the Bible for themselves. That puzzles me. Preachers preach their sermons.

Teachers teach their lessons. Seminary professors diligently train young ministers how to develop their all-iterative firstlies, secondlies, and thirdlies, all from the Bible, to be sure. But where are the churches, ministers, teachers, or seminary professors who, save for an occasional exhortation, are setting themselves to establish the Bible-reading habits among those who are under their pastoral care? And he goes on.

I mean, he really hits this thing, and he hit me. I thought, well, sounds good. Give it a try.

And he said it'll work. He guaranteed it'll work. And you know what? It did.

It did. People started reading the Bible. People started getting excited about the Bible.

Every week they know exactly where I'll be preaching from. It's a game with the people to figure out just what text I will use, just what portion I will expound on. And a lot of times they'll come up, I know what you're going to be speaking on today, you know.

I know the Scripture, you know. And they're in the Word. They're studying the Word.

They're learning the Word. And as a result, they're growing. Now, there are other churches that have taken for their distinctive other things than the Bible and teaching the Bible.

But teaching the Word of God is a distinctive of the Calvary chapels. Making the people very literate, as far as the Bible is concerned, is definitely a Calvary chapel distinctive. Teaching through the books of the Bible is a distinctive.

There are some churches whose major emphasis is exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. Their chief desire is for spiritual manifestations. And as a result, the congregants of that church are in an arrested state of spiritual development.

Because no matter how exciting the miracles may be, you cannot grow spiritually in the observation of miracles, or of wonders, or of signs. Growth only comes, Christian growth only comes from the Word of God. It is the food that feeds the Spirit.

Another problem with people who are attracted by that spectacular manifestations and spiritual phenomena is that to keep them coming and to keep their interest, you must ever be having new or more exaggerated manifestations. There is something about human nature that after a while, anything repeated over and over again loses the excitement that it first had. And thus, some novel little twist has to be added

to renew the state of excitement.

And that is why you find them going from one thing to another, to another, to another, till it's sort of a guessing game of what are they going to go to next. And already when you look at some of these Copelands and Higgins and all, they've gone so far that they are now almost in the place I would judge them as apostate. They've gone so far in trying to keep this novel, new, exciting kind of a thing going.

And that's the danger. You run out of the legitimate, and you begin to get into the illegitimate. There was a few years back a decision made by many of the pastors of the Calvary chapels to go the experience route in the manifestations, and that was their option.

And we warned them that they were free to take that option, even as you're free to take it, but there are inherent dangers to it. And the very things that we said would happen have happened. And they keep jumping from one kind of a phenomenon to another.

You know, from the divine healings to the casting out of the deliverance of the believers from their demons to the this and to the that and to the other and now to the prophets and what will be next. I don't know. But I've watched it.

I've been around a while, believe it or not. I know I don't look like it, but you wait till you see Raul's movie, and you'll see. The years have taken their toll.

Now, others have made their chief emphasis evangelism. Their whole desire is to reach the unchurched. Their services are designed to be very relevant, very entertaining to the sinner and to the saint alike.

The messages are often psychological insights on life interspersed with a lot of humor. Rather than quoting from Paul and Jesus and Peter, it's Maslow and Pavlov and Freud and Jung, you know. And their result, again, is that the people are in an arrested state of spiritual development.

People are not being led into spiritual maturity. They draw the crowd that has itching ears, that want to be entertained when they go to church. There are still other churches that have as their major emphasis the development of a social community, a place where people can develop nice friendships with nice people.

Everything is well organized. There are plenty of pie bakes and box lunches and parties. The pastor is sort of the director of the social activities, and he must be witty and humorous, and he entertains them with his charming personality.

The problem is there is no spiritual development. In the others, you get at least an arrested state of spiritual development, but with this, there is no spiritual development. God is an impersonal force of good, an essence that can be discovered in the aroma of a rose or in the beauty of a sunset, you know.

And it's a nice social club for nice people who like nice things. It's nice to be nice, you know. Now, when you are dealing with people in these other contexts where there is no spiritual growth and development, the problem is, is that you're always dealing with carnal people.

And carnal people are the hardest people in the world to deal with. And thus, you constantly have your little factions, because Paul said that's the mark of carnality. We're of Paul.

We're of Paulus. We're of Cephas, you know. And you've got these little groups that are all divided, and they get at each other, and you better, as the pastor, toe the mark, and you better come to our side, or

we're leaving, you know.

And you're constantly going around trying to heal things and patch people up and smooth out the ruffled feathers. And you spend your whole ministry just trying to keep things together, because they're always a threat of being blown apart, because you've got so many carnal people you're ministering to. And they're carnal because you have failed to teach them the Word of God, whereby they might grow into a maturity.

All they know is evangelism, or all they know is entertainment, or all they know is the excitement and the tingle when I raise my hands. But they don't know the Word of God. They have no solid foundation in the truths of God.

And that comes back to the pastor. Paul said, you're babes in Christ. You're carnal.

And like babies, they demand their own ways, and they throw tantrums when they don't get them. So Calvary chapels have a distinctive idea of teaching the Bible, teaching through the Bible, not teaching from the Bible, teaching the Bible. And if that isn't a distinctive of your ministry, I would encourage you to go back to Bill Heibel's pastor's conference and learn how to entertain people, or go to Robert Shuler's and learn how to entertain, and have a relevant program that will appeal to everyone, or join with the Southern Baptists and really learn how to evangelize your community, or the Mormons or some of these others who have a tremendous social program.

You're free. And if you want to spend your whole life just trying to patch up disgruntled people, then just keep feeding them whipped cream and hot fudge sundaes, and you can have them. Keep them, please.

Oh, I encourage you. Teach the Word of God. Watch the growth.

The most exciting thing in the world is to watch people grow from being nourished and strengthened and fed God's truth.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/23/SID23888.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chuck-smith/chosen-vessel-calvary-chapels-method-of-teaching/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net