

UNIQUE & UNIFIED

THE CALVARY CHAPEL DISTINCTIVES

This article is condensed with permission and taken from Calvary Chapel Distinctives by the late Pastor Chuck Smith.

Over the next few issues, Calvary Chapel Magazine will be featuring a series on the Calvary Chapel Distinctives. Here follow the first three of twelve distinctives.

What makes Calvary Chapel different from other Bible-believing, evangelical churches? Certainly there are churches that share many of our beliefs and practices. We're not renegades. But God has done a wonderful work of balance in the Calvary Chapel movement that makes us different in many areas.

In Calvary Chapel, we find the teaching of the Word and an open heart to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is this balance that makes us a distinct and uniquely blessed movement of God. And so it's important to understand the biblical principles behind why God has allowed us to exist and grow.

This is not to say that all Calvary Chapels are identical. God, desiring to reach and bless all kinds of people, seems to enjoy having a wide variety of churches so that everybody's needs might be met—from the highly emotional to the very formal, and all those in between. Each of us has a part to play in God's plan, but we all need to know where we fit in this wide spectrum. That is why it's crucial for us to grasp what we call the Calvary Chapel Distinctives. As we see what makes our fellowship unique, we will also better understand our position in the Body of Christ.

The Call to the Ministry

It's absolutely essential for effective ministry that we have a conviction in our hearts that God has chosen and called us to serve Him. Ministry is not a profession or an option. It's a calling of God. As Paul expressed it, **"woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"** (1 Corinthians 9:16b). A pastor must also be committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I am what I am not by my own ambitions, desires, or will. I am what I am by His will.

If I am committed to the Lord, I will also be committed to His Word and His ministry—to serve others. Jesus said, **"Whoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all"** (Mark 10:43b-44). The ministry is not a place of being served—of people waiting on you, honoring you, and respecting you because you're the minister. It's actually a place of serving people. You need to do everything as unto the Lord, knowing that of Him you will receive your reward.

There must also be a commitment to the Word of God. Anyone who doesn't believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God has no business being in the ministry. Be committed to it. As Paul said to Timothy, **"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"** (2 Timothy 2:15). You can learn how to study the Bible, but the learning process is never-ending.

God's Model for the Church

In Calvary Chapel, we look to the Book of Acts as the model for the church. This church was dynamic, led by the Holy Spirit, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit directed its operation and ministry. This church brought the Gospel to the world.

There were four basic functions of the early church. Acts 2:42 tells us, **"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."** These four foundations are essential for a fellowship of believers. If we lead people steadfastly in the Word of God, teaching the apostles' doctrine, bringing them into fellowship, participating in the breaking of bread, and praying together, we will see God meet every need. The Lord certainly took care of everything for the church in Acts. **"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"** (Acts 2:47b). Never forget that it's not the pastor's job to add to the church. His job is to

feed the flock, tend the flock, love the flock, and see that they're well cared for.

The Church leaders in Acts were totally surrendered to Jesus Christ, not seeking their own glory, but only seeking to bring glory to Jesus. This is heavy on my own heart as we see people today striving to be successful, to create a name, to bring glory to themselves. However, Jesus insisted that the way up is down. **"And whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"** (Matthew 23:12). So live for the kingdom of God. Seek to bring glory to Jesus Christ and the Lord will use you.

Empowered by the Spirit

Another CC distinctive is our position concerning the Holy Spirit. We believe there is an empowering of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer that is distinct and separate from the indwelling of the Spirit at conversion. We acknowledge a three-fold relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believer that is represented by three Greek prepositions—'para' (with), 'en' (in), and 'epi' (upon).

In John 14, Jesus told the disciples, **"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you"** (John 14:16-17). 'With you' speaks of the 'para' relationship, the coming alongside. The 'en' or 'in you' is equivalent to our English preposition 'in' as in "He is going to dwell in you."

We believe that the Holy Spirit is dwelling with a person prior to conversion: He is convicting him of his sin, convincing him that Jesus Christ is the only answer. When anyone invites Jesus to come into his heart, to take control of his life, the Holy Spirit then comes into that person's life. He brings us to Christ, and when we come to Christ, He dwells in us.

We believe that there is a third, distinct relationship that the believer can have with the Spirit. In Acts 1:8a, we see this promise, **"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."** When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, the word is 'epi' in the Greek—'upon' or 'over'. I prefer the translation of 'overflow' because I believe this experience allows the Holy Spirit to flow forth out of our lives. Our lives then are not just vessels containing the Spirit, but they become channels by which the Spirit flows forth to touch the world around us. This 'coming upon' allows us to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.

When Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, **"Receive ye the Holy Ghost"** (John 20:22b), then they received the Holy Spirit. I believe that at that moment the disciples were born again by the Spirit of God. Then Jesus told His disciples that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). He also said, **"But ye shall receive power [dunamis], after that the Holy Ghost is come upon [epi] you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me"** (Acts 1:8a). They needed that overflowing of the Spirit to effectively share Christ.

So it's one thing to be filled with the Spirit, and it's quite another to have the Spirit flowing out. The inlet of the Spirit is powerful and dynamic, but there has to be that flowing forth of the Spirit from my life to affect and touch others around me. So we believe that there is an experience with the Holy Spirit that is distinct from conversion and indwelling. Some call it baptism. Some call it being filled with the Spirit. Whatever we choose to call it, it means being overflowed with the Spirit. The main question we must ask concerning this necessary empowering experience for the ministry is simple: Do you have it? ☞

Next issue, we will feature: *Building the Church God's Way, Grace Upon Grace, and The Priority of the Word.*

All Bible verses are quoted from the KJV.