

# THE CALVARY CHAPEL DISTINCTIVES UNIQUE & UNIFIED

By Christmas Beeler

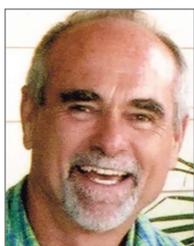
Part two of a continuing series on the Calvary Chapel Distinctives. This issue includes: *Building the Church God's Way*, *Grace upon Grace*, and *the Priority of the Word*.

## Building the Church God's Way

**Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.** ZECHARIAH 4:6b

What defines Calvary Chapel? In his book *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, the late Pastor Chuck Smith explained, "There isn't a lot of spiritual hype. The pastor doesn't try to motivate people carnally [or] shout at the congregation." He cited Psalm 127:1, **Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it** (NKJV). Chuck assured, "[H]ype and pressure aren't really going to do the job. We simply trust in the work of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus Christ is building His church as He said He would."

Chuck advised, "[W]hen you strive to gain, you must then strive to maintain.... If it's the Lord's work, if He has done it and He has added, then you don't have to strive to keep it going." He warned that pastors don't need to "find some new angle, gimmick, or experience. It's just the Word of God—alive and powerful [which] ministers to the spirit of the people."



**Pastor Bill Stonebraker**

Pastor Bill Stonebraker of CC Honolulu, HI, remembers how the Lord birthed a new fellowship on Oahu's North Shore many years ago. "God sees the need, and He uses who is available. In the early 1970s, the Jesus Movement was happening. The Lord began to pour His Spirit out on the North Shore. Every week, our home—just 800 square feet—was packed with 80 to 90 young people for Bible study. We prayed: 'God, bring somebody who knows what they're doing.' He never did; instead, He enlisted me. There was a need, and I was available." Bill met a fellow surfer who gave him a teaching tape by Chuck Smith. "I thought, *This is exactly how God is leading us*. We believed in the work of the Holy Spirit, along with the balanced teaching of God's Word: We just

let God do the work." During the early house meetings, "We'd play a Chuck tape, pray for people, ask the Spirit to move, and incredible things would happen. We were so intimidated with all these people coming and expecting something from God. We would pray beforehand: 'God, if You don't show up, nothing is going to happen.' And every week, He would."

Sometimes, once a ministry begins to experience success, Bill cautioned, "You're not quite as dependent on the Lord as you were before. You do things by rote: pull out your old notes and preach them again, expecting the same thing to happen. But originally you were on your knees crying out to God, 'Give me something valuable to share.'" He added, "Chuck never changed; he always depended on the Holy Spirit. That's so important. God has given us everything we need: the completed work of Jesus on the cross, and His Holy Spirit to empower us. We can't take credit at all."

Following God's leading often requires a step of faith. "I was inspired when Don McClure left Twin Peaks in 1979 to start a new church. After 10 years, we turned the North Shore church over to Mike Stangel and went to the opposite end of the island to start CC Honolulu in 1982. The scary thing was, we had three children, no income, and only a handful of people who came to help. We prayed, crying out to the Lord for help." Just a few months after the move, they began receiving \$1,200 from two donors in monthly support. "We were in tears; we saw God providing and affirming our steps of faith."

Today, CC Honolulu has two radio stations, a beautiful six-acre campus, several ministry houses, and a K-12 school. Bill rejoiced, "God has been faithful beyond our hopes. The next generation, we want them to carry on the integrity of the ministry that God has given. No man can put his fingerprints on it. When I am weak, that's when God is strong." He urged pastors to "be genuine, be yourself, stay faithful to the Lord in the little things, and simply teach the Word of God." He exhorted, "God is not going to reward us based on the size of our churches, but on how faithful we were to minister to those that God has given us."

## Grace upon Grace

*For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.* HEBREWS 13:9b

Pastor Chuck explained CC's position on grace: "Without the grace of God, none of us would have a chance. We need the grace of God in our lives...daily. We experience it, and we're also saved by it personally. But we also stand in grace. We believe in the love and grace that seeks to restore the fallen." He continued, "Having been forgiven, we need to be forgiving. Having received mercy, we must show mercy. Having received grace, we must be gracious."

When the Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus and wanted to stone her, Jesus said to them, "**He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her**" (John 8:7b). When her accusers had gone away, Jesus stated to the woman, "**Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more**" (John 8:11b). Chuck shared, "Jesus was interested in ministering to [her], helping her, putting her life back together, not condemning her. Calvary Chapel seeks to minister to hurting people—to see them restored." John 1:17 says, *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* In light of this, Chuck said, "If I am to be a minister of Jesus Christ, then I must be ministering grace."



Pastor David Rosales

Pastor David Rosales of CC Chino Valley, CA, explained, "Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Every aspect of the believer's life is saturated by the grace of God. All true ministry begins with God's grace." He cited, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8). "So we received

from God the grace that enables us to be saved, to remain steadfast in Him, and we also receive our spiritual gifts by the grace of God—having *gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us*" (Romans 12:6b, NKJV). Saved in 1970 at age 20, Pastor David recalled how Pastor Chuck and Kay reached out to the young hippies when many traditional churches were condemning them. "Pastor Chuck proclaimed a message filled with the grace of God. He saw the need for that because of the wretched lives we lived. We needed to know that we could never be good enough on our own, and that we needed help. So instead of preaching to us to cut our hair, take a bath, and get a job—the first thing Chuck wanted us to understand was how good God is, what He can do, how He changes you."

David remembered, "I was raised in a traditional church, but I had never heard the message of God's welcoming love. Grace was something I got after I did something—confession, penance. So I was amazed when I heard that Jesus would extend to me the favor of God if I would just confess my sin to Him and receive His grace. I didn't need to clean myself up; I just needed to come to Him and ask Him to cleanse me."

As a young man aware of his sinful lifestyle, David was captivated by how Jesus repeatedly showed grace to sinners in the New Testament: the Samaritan woman at the well living with a man out of wedlock in John 4; the woman caught in adultery in John 8; the woman with a bad reputation who washed Jesus's feet with her tears in Luke 7. "Jesus said the one who is a great sinner will be forgiven much and will love Him much," he recalled. That kind of unlimited grace "affected the rest of my life. Over the years, I have extended God's grace to others because that's what God extended to me."

Grace does not mean condoning sin. "I have seen that *love covers a multitude of sins* (1 Peter 4:8b, HCSB). And when you genuinely love someone in the Lord, you're going to be real with them—not turn a deaf ear or blind eye to blatant sin in their lives. But you're also not going to be judging them." He cited Romans 6:1b-2a, *Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.* He added, "God's grace was not given to us to enable us to continue in sin but to free us from the bondage of sin."

Pastor David concluded, "When you don't understand the grace of God, you create a system of self-righteousness built on human effort. Then you end up with cults like Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the Muslim faith. These all attempt to be good people in their own power to gain righteousness." The self-righteous will eventually be discouraged by their failure, but those who understand God's unconditional love and grace will love Him more. He explained, "That's how grace works: We are not out trying to earn God's favor, but we are humbly saying, 'I need God's favor.' And then we believe we have it because He promised, and our God does not lie."

## Priority of the Word

*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* ACTS 20:27

Citing the above verse, Pastor Chuck remarked, "The only way a person [today] could make that claim would be if he

taught through the whole Word of God ... from Genesis to Revelation." Though topical messages may have their place on occasion, Chuck commented, he took his congregation at CC Costa Mesa, CA, through the entire Bible at least eight times.

Teaching through the Bible *precept upon precept; line upon line* (Isaiah 28:13b), means going verse by verse through each chapter in an expositional style. *So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading* (Nehemiah 8:8). Chuck explained, "[T]his is a worthy definition of expositional preaching—to read the Word, give the sense, and cause people to understand the meaning."

He urged pastors to faithfully teach the Word, even if they don't see much growth at first. "The seed [of the Word] doesn't bear fruit overnight. ...As a general rule, it's in the third year that you begin to see fruit as a result of planting the Word in the hearts of the people." Rather than imitating flashy ministries that draw temporary crowds, Chuck urged pastors to aim for eternal rewards: *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).

Pastor Jeff Johnson of CC Downey, CA, commented, "In 45 years of ministry, I have found that what people need is the Word. They don't need our philosophies or our stories. ...It takes time and patience, but that's what ministers to the people. The Word gives us healing and opens hearts and eyes. The Word is our counselor, gives us direction—it's the answer book to everything in life." He cited 1 John 2:14b, *[Y]oung men ... you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one* (NKJV). "The Word helps us in our spiritual warfare, with our marriage, our job. It brings us victory. We need to trust the Word of God, really get into the Word, and submit to the Word—not leaning on our own understanding but doing what He says."

Jeff rejoiced, "We continue to see many lives transformed. God tells us, *'My word ... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish ... the thing for which I sent it'*" (Isaiah 55:11b, NKJV). When His Word goes out, we're seeing tremendous healings. I believe the world, the flesh, and the devil are trying to distract us and keep us from the Word of God—because the enemy knows that when we get in the Word, we're going to have the victory."



Pastor Jeff Johnson

The Word of God helps us resist temptation. Jeff summarized Luke 4:1-12: "When Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted three times, each time Jesus responded by saying, *'It is written,'* and He quoted Scripture. We need to know the Word so well that we can stand when temptation comes. Get into it—read it, mark it, study it, spend time in it, get to know it." For those who have a hard time reading the Bible, he suggested, "If you don't have a hunger toward the Word, find a good translation that speaks to you and ask God to give you a hunger for His Word. We can ask God for that hunger."

We also need to read Scripture daily. *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine* (Acts 2:42a, NKJV). Pastor Jeff explained, "They 'steadfastly' continued—it's every day. We need to be walking in the Word so that we can be walking in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit. There's no other way; you've got to tune into God to be led God's way and not your way."

Believing only parts of the Word, he said, will lead to "carnality in your life, in your relationship with God. We have to take the whole counsel of God, cover to cover. This is the answer book for us if we want to have an impact on the world and make a difference." ✨

*All Scripture quoted from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.*

**"THE WORD IS OUR COUNSELOR, GIVES US DIRECTION—IT'S THE ANSWER BOOK TO EVERYTHING IN LIFE."—PASTOR JEFF JOHNSON**