



Parson to Parson,

The time has come for us to restate the position of Calvary Chapel on a number of issues. We do this because Calvary Chapel has become known to represent a fairly definable entity in its approach to sound biblical teaching and approach to biblical doctrine. It's not that we believe we have the "best" or "only" way; it's simply the way we approach God's word within Calvary Chapel. And likewise, if a different approach is to be taken, then all we ask is that the name Calvary Chapel not be attached to it.

First of all, Calvary Chapel is not a denomination; but rather a movement. We often receive inquiries as to whether or not Calvary Chapel has some kind of relationship with a national or international group. We answer such inquiries with our stated position that each church is independent and has established its own set of bylaws. We seek to identify with the true body of Christ in many denominations. We are ministers who hold basic common beliefs, and maintain them within a varied range of practices. We believe that every minister is responsible to Jesus as the chief Shepherd, and will ultimately answer to Him for his ministry and not to us. We love and respect each other and rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with those who weep. As with the Apostle Paul, we do not feel that we have apprehended that for which we were apprehended, neither are we perfect, but this is what we seek to do. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching for those things that are before, we press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, we hold to the supremacy of Jesus as the head of the body, His church. We look to the Holy Spirit to guide and direct each decision in the building up of the body of Christ. Having begun in the Spirit, we do not seek to be made perfect in the flesh, but seek to continue to be led by the Spirit. We believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and is infallible and the final authority for our faith and practice. We believe that God established the model for the church in the book of Acts, and seek to follow that model as much as is possible. We feel that church history is for the most part a sad commentary of the failure of men who sought by human genius and resources to perfect that which was begun in the Spirit. The messages of Jesus to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 show how early in the history of the church problems developed for which they need to repent. So much for church history, but something that we must not simply disregard. We must realize that it shows us so clearly how the enemy has, is, and will continue the attacks upon the church and upon our individual ministries. How our heart grieves for the many who have started the race but have failed to complete it.

In the book of Acts we see that the activities of the church were described as:

1. Continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, which we understand to be a systematic teaching of the Bible.
2. Fellowship, which we understand to be a loving and caring relationship with each other. As John wrote, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that you may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ."
3. The breaking of bread. This to us is a tangible representation of the unity that we share in Christ for we understand that the bread speaks to us of the body of Christ which was broken for us, and as we all eat the bread and it is assimilated into our bodies, we are spiritually united through Jesus with each other; in the fact that the bread that is nourishing me and is becoming a part of me, is also nourishing you and becoming a part of you. Thus, we are united together in Christ. He dwells in me; He dwells in you.
4. Prayer. Through prayer we unite our hearts with the heart of God that we might see His will accomplished in the church and throughout the world.

We believe that when the church will make these four things the major activities of the church, that happened in the book of Acts, the Lord will add daily to the church such as should be saved. Thus, we do not look to the myriad of church growth programs that are being promoted for the building of the church but to Jesus Himself, who said that He would build His church. We do watch as the many programs come and go in which man by his wisdom tries to do the work of God more effectively, but rather than entering into the programs of man, seek to continue to be led by the Spirit of God. We realize that the Scriptures warn us of aberrant doctrines that would come into the church, even going so far as to deny our Lord Jesus. Second Peter chapter 2, verse 1 tells us, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privately shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." Likewise in Jude, chapter 1, verse 4 we read, "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

We see a tendency toward this in what is commonly called the "Emergent Church" teachings. Some of the concerns that we have are with the speculations and positions that they are suggesting:

1. That Jesus is not the only way by which one might be saved. It seems that they are postulating a broader gate and a broader path to heaven, a sort of "all roads lead to heaven." That good people by every religious persuasion may be received into heaven. We feel that this goes against the plain teaching of the Scriptures and negates the need of the cross for the expiation of our sins. Paul wrote of those men in his letter to the Philippians and called them enemies of the cross of Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man can come to the Father but by Me." This is not relative truth, but absolute truth.

2. The soft peddling of hell as the destiny for those who reject the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. There are suggestions of universalism in their teaching, that all will ultimately be saved.

3. We have difficulty in their touchy-feely relating to God. Where the experience of certain feelings become the criteria for truth rather than the word of God.

4. We have great problems with the use of icons to give them a sense of God or the presence of God. If they want to have a tie with the historicity of the church, why not go back to the church in Acts, which seems to be devoid of incense, candles, robes etc., but was filled with the Spirit.

5. We do not believe that we should seek to make sinners feel safe and comfortable in church. Is it right for me to speak comfortable words to a man who is going to hell unless he turns from his sin? If I fail to warn him of the consequences of his sin, and he dies and goes to hell, will God require his blood at my hand? When is godly sorrow and conviction of sin such a wrong thing?

6. Should we seek to condone what God has condemned, such as the homosexual lifestyle? Should we tell them that their problem is a genetic disorder rather than a blatant sin that God condemns over and over in the Bible? How long before they tell us that they have discovered that rapists, pedophiles, and adulterers have a genetic disorder and need to be understood rather than condemned?

7. Should we look to Eastern religions with their practices of meditation through Yoga and special breathing techniques or repeating a mantra to hear God speak to us? If this is needed to enhance our communication with God, why do you suppose that God did not give us implicit instructions in the Scriptures to give us methods to hear His voice? Is it the position of my body or my heart that helps me to communicate with Him?

8. The great confusion that exists in the divergent positions of the Emergent Church results from their challenging the final authority of the Scriptures. When you no longer have a final authority, then everyone's ideas become as valid as the next person's, and it cannot help but end in total confusion and contradictions.

There are those who say that Emergent movement has some good points, but so does a porcupine. You are better off if you don't get too close!

So, let us not turn to our own understanding, but rather return to our own first love; and teach that the Bible is indeed the true word of God; and teach it in its entirety; nothing less and nothing more.