

CALVARY CHAPEL THEOLOGY

As is evident in *GRACE, -What WE Should Believe*, I quote extensively from the writings of Pastor Chuck Smith, as well other Calvary Chapel pastors and ministers associated with the Calvary Movement. I also rely upon the published writings of other mainstream Evangelicals who share many (if not most) of my/our views.

While I take full responsibility for the way the theology and doctrine is presented in this journal, I believe it will accurately and fairly reflect (for the most part) the views of a majority of Calvary Chapel pastors who are inclined to a consideration of theological and doctrinal matters. No one who believes much about anything (despite what they might want you to think) figured it all out themselves. Everyone, for good or bad has/is being influenced by others. That is as true in matters of a theological and spiritual nature as in just about everything else where leaning and education takes place Everyone is and should be learning and educated in the great truths of God's holy and infallible word..

WHAT WE AGREE ON

After more than forty-two years of recorded teachings, the views of Pastor Chuck Smith (on the most important, foundational, and fundamental doctrines of biblical Christianity) are easy to understand and just as easy to document. Although Pastor Chuck has not written a systematic theology as such (at least not that I know of) it is fair to say that his teachings (preserved in many forms) *contain* a systematic theology.

I am not only very familiar with what Chuck teaches but on what a great many other Calvary Chapel pastors (some well-known and some not so well-known) believe and teach as well. Like me, most of them have been greatly and positively influenced by Pastor Chuck's teachings on a wide variety of topics covered in Scripture. Why would anyone think otherwise? What John Calvin taught influences what some Christians believe Scripture teaches on some matters of scriptural importance. In turn, he was heavily influenced by Augustine. Who could deny that John Wesley made a big impression on a lot of believers in his generation and that he was influenced by James Arminius. Calvin repeatedly acknowledged the influence of Augustine and Wesley unashamedly admitted to being influenced by James Arminius.

Many good and godly men have had a positive impact on what pastor Chuck Smith believes and teaches (including men like J. Vernon McGee). Everyone who truly

knows pastor Chuck knows that he is a serious reader and always has been. Just as Chuck has been influenced by other good and godly men over the years, Chuck has had an impact others. It should not be considered strange that Pastor Chuck would influence the doctrinal direction of the Calvary Chapel movement, of which he is the senior pastor of the first of many independent and self-governed Calvary related churches. To a greater or lesser degree, everyone who stands in the pulpit over many years will undoubtedly have an impact on what other Christians believe. God has used pastor Chuck to touch the lives of hundreds of thousands and even millions others, of which I am just one.

Sometimes the influence of others is positive and sometimes it is not so positive, as is the case of men who believe in and teach false doctrines, and thereby mislead many others in the process. On a lot of non-essentials and non-distinctives, there is a great deal of diversity among Calvary Chapel pastors. On the most important matters of theological and doctrinal concern, there is also considerable agreement among us.

The views expressed in this journal are meant to reflect what many (and I assume most) Calvary Chapel pastors agree on as well as on what many other mainstream Evangelicals (formally unrelated to the Calvary Chapel movement) also agree on. It does not pretend to be a perfect representation of the theology of Calvary Chapel pastors in particular or of many mainstream Evangelicals in general. It is, however, an informed (from a life-time of serious study and real life ministry and experience) explanation of important doctrines of biblical Christianity. It intends to both fairly and accurately reflect what millions of non-Reformed orthodox Evangelicals believe.

BACKGROUND

Like thousands of others in ministry today, I came to *faith in Christ* through the ministry of Pastor Chuck and Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa in 1968. Since the wonderful day of my salvation (like so many others of this generation) I have also been encouraged by Pastor Chuck to build upon my faith in Christ and spend the rest of my earthly sojourn endeavoring to be as *faithful to Christ* as possible. That is, after I was justified and regenerated (which was by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ alone) I was challenged to give a proper and biblically based and balanced emphasis to practical sanctification and the closely related matter of spiritual maturation.

From day one I was taught that those who believe in Christ, should endeavor to live for Christ. I was also taught that by reading and heeding what God says in His holy and infallible Word, and by yielding or submitting to the power of God's Holy Spirit, faithfully following Christ (however imperfectly) was not only possible for every child of God but was expected of every child of God. I continue to firmly believe this more than forty decades after I first learned it.

I have been with Pastor Chuck and the Calvary Chapel movement for over 40 years. I started out (with my wife) as an itinerant youth minister, traveling throughout America with a ministry called Shiloh. Shiloh was an outreach of Calvary Chapel to the young people of the counter-culture of that time. After nearly a decade in Shiloh, in the late seventies I became the senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel of Eugene-Springfield. In the very early eighties I added to my pastoral duties a daily (2 1/2 hour) call-in Christian talk show, called *Scripturally Speaking*. My involvement in this kind of radio ministry was a reflection and extension of my serious interest in all matters of a biblical and theological nature. To varying degrees and in various ways, I am still involved in ministry on the radio.

In 1988 I embarked on my first mission to the former Soviet Union. These were the latter years of perestroika and glasnost and were exciting to say the least. In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved and the doors opened wide in the CIS for the Gospel. It was then that I began traveling back and forth (almost every month) helping plant and nurture Calvary Chapel churches in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. This new opportunity that opened up for believers in what was previously a very closed land, was even more to my liking. With the encouragement of Pastor Chuck, I started a full-time work (primarily in and to Russia) called *Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission*. I am the director of CCCPM to this very day. From the day I came to know Christ as my Savior I have been very interested in and committed to the study of Scripture, apologetics, as well as biblical and systematic theology.

Like a lot of Calvary Chapel pastors, after a few years in the ministry, I decided to continue my study of Scripture and theology in a more formal fashion. I studied New Testament Greek at a local Christian College and was in my own estimate a less than stellar student. I also studied Biblical Hebrew at a nearby University, where I received good grades but hardly know an Aleph from an Alpha. I suspect that my good grades can be accounted for because my professor (also a local Rabbi) and I had previously become good friends.

Eventually I found myself in a graduate level study of theology (New Testament and Systematic) in a program that was established for those who worked fulltime during the day and could only take classes in the evening. I already loved theology (as my friends will attest) and a graduate program of this kind made me feel like "a kid in a candy store". I do not point this out to suggest that I know more about theology than someone with no formal training in theology. That is certainly not the case. I do not necessarily know less than someone with more formal training in theology. Formal or even advanced training can be very helpful and for me I believe it was. But some heretics were formally trained and have very "advanced" degrees in theology.

The final measure will not be how much we know (in doctrinal or practical terms) but how right we are in what we believe and how we live our lives in light of the truth revealed to us in Scripture. And since everything we ought to believe (and how we ought to behave) is found in the pages of Scripture (and not always or even necessarily in a seminary class) I rarely ever make mention my formal education. For me it was a good thing and I am glad I did it. But I would rather learn from someone who has only studied his Bible and passed on to me the truth of it from Scripture than by someone who has picked up and passes on a lot of errors. The Lord knows that is also an unfortunate possibility.

I have written articles and books (of a theological nature) published by the two main publishing arms of Calvary Chapel (*The Word For Today* and *Calvary Publishing*). These books can be down-loaded and are available at no-charge on this site. I have even been published by a mainstream "Reformed" publishing house. Don't panic, the book I wrote that was published by a "Reformed" publishing company was not about Reformed Theology though it was edited by a well-known Reformed scholar. I understand and agree with the foundational and fundamental theology and doctrine of the Calvary Chapel movement. Although I consider myself to be "Calvary to the core" I am also convinced that the foundational and fundamental theology and doctrine of the Calvary Chapel movement is (for the most part) also foundational and fundamental to a non-Reformed but Orthodox Evangelicalism.

Not even what we call the Calvary Distinctives (which are or should be very important to all Calvary Chapel pastors, myself included) are unique to us or even uncommon among many other Orthodox Evangelicals. Thus, what I would refer to as Calvary Chapel theology and doctrine is essentially the theology and doctrine of a great many other Christ-centered, bible believing Christians. These Christ-centered Christians (to which I refer) may identify with churches, and church associations, both denominational and non-denominational. Calvary Chapel has never functioned in isolation.

If you look at the guest speaker list on a lot of Calvary Chapel websites you cannot help but notice how many non-Calvary folks minister to Calvary Chapel folks from the pulpit of a Calvary Chapel or a Calvary Chapel conference. Some of these guest speakers are even Calvinists, though they do not typically use such an occasion to push or promote Calvinism. If they did, it would likely be their last invitation to a Calvary Chapel or a Calvary conference.

Not everyone who calls himself an Evangelical (and who in fact may be an Evangelical) will agree with all of the theology and doctrine of the Calvary Chapel movement in particular or of the Evangelicals I quote (with agreement) in a lot in my writings. Some of what is affirmed in this journal will be denied by some Evangelicals. Evangelicalism is a "big tent" theologically speaking. When an

Evangelical does differ with me on a particular point, it is mostly likely to be on matters with which he will differ with a very large number of other Orthodox Evangelicals as well.

On the most important theological and doctrinal matters, the majority of Orthodox Evangelicals agree. It is my view that Calvary Chapel does not stand theologically or doctrinally alone (among Orthodox Evangelicals) on any particular issue. At least not on any theological or doctrinal matter of which I am aware. Calvary Chapel comes down decidedly in agreement with some non-Calvary Chapel Evangelicals (i.e., dispensationalists) and decidedly in disagreement with other non-Calvary Chapel Evangelicals, such as those that are distinctively Reformed in their thinking and theology. Despite the substantial differences between Calvinists and non-Calvinist Evangelicals (especially concerning who can be saved and why) there is also a lot of matters in which Reformed and non-Reformed Evangelicals agree.

PREVIEW

*Concerning the doctrine of the Bible, we believe Scripture is inerrant and infallible in all that it affirms. We do not believe the Bible is true because it says it is but we believe it says it's true because in fact it is true. We believe that if an affirmation of Scripture touches upon history, geography, science, spirituality, ethics, morality etc., those affirmations are historically, geographically, scientifically, spiritually, ethically, morally etc, true and therefore can and should be trusted and or believed.

*On our doctrine of God we are, without reservation, Trinitarians. As Trinitarians we are also (by definition) strictly monotheists. We reject Unitarianism because Unitarianism is a denial of the three divine persons (i.e. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), as revealed to us in Scripture. We deny all forms of Modalism, which is a very unscriptural view of God, wherein the persons of the trinity are confused and confounded. As Trinitarians we also deny (by definition) all forms of Tritheism, Polytheism and Henotheism.

*On our doctrine of man we believe in *both* the dignity (and worth) of man because He was created in the image of God and the depravity (and unworthiness) of man because our first parents sinned and through Adam passed that sin onto all of the sons of men, with the exception of Jesus Christ. We see no conflict between affirming both the worth and unworthiness of man at the same time. We have worth as is reflected in the price our redeemer willingly and knowingly paid for us. We are unworthy as is reflected in our need for a salvation which is by grace alone.

*Concerning the doctrine of Christ we believe Jesus is the only Savior and the eternal uncreated creator and the second person of the Holy Trinity. We also believe that God the Son, in His incarnation, became truly man, while remaining truly God. He is now and forever will be the God-Man. Although we believe that

Jesus, was, is, and will always be God, we also believe that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind, rose bodily and gloriously from the dead (to die no more), has ascended bodily to the right hand of God the Father and will some day bodily return to this earth.

*Concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity and that He lives within the believer from the moment the believer first believes in Jesus Christ for salvation. We are neither cessationists (excluding what God has not excluded in His Word) nor sensationalists, whereby emotionalism, and superstitionism is confused with the truly supernatural and spiritual work of God. While we are convinced that as believers we should rely upon the Holy Word of God to guide us throughout our lives in this unholy world, we also believe that we should depend upon the person and power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to successfully (even if not perfectly) live holy in this unholy world.

*Concerning our doctrine of salvation we believe in Salvation by Grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. We do not believe in universalism or elitism. We believe Christ died redemptively for all and not just some. We do not believe in the fatalism of Calvinism on one side or Open theism or process theology on the other side. As with other heirs of the Reformation (not to be confused with Reformed Theology), we believe in salvation by grace but not the so-called doctrines of grace, a synonym for Reformed theology or Calvinism.

*Concerning our doctrine of the church, we believe that all Christians who truly trust in the true Christ are in Christ and are therefore members of the body of Christ. We recognize that God gave birth to the church universal (on the day of Pentecost) and has ordained local representations we call local churches. We believe local churches without formal affiliation or in association with other churches are legitimate manifestations of the church universal, to the degree that its members have trusted Christ to be their Savior. We believe that a church is a healthy church when those that have faith in Christ for salvation, also faithfully follow Christ in sanctification.

We believe that local churches may join with other local churches for theological and or practical reasons. The nature of that relationship may manifest itself as a denomination or as non-denominational. We recognize that the government of individual churches or groups of churches can vary a great deal. Some may be governed or led by elders, congregations, or a Senior Pastor (typically working with a ministry team supportive of the Senior pastor) as is the case for Calvary Chapel churches. We believe this is the business of each church or group of churches to work out in accordance with how they believe God would guide them in light of what they believe Scripture teaches.

*Concerning our doctrine of "last things" or "end-times" we are pre-millennial and pre-tribulational. This means that while we believe Jesus can and may come at any time or moment (and only God knows when that will be) we believe that before He comes to set up His thousand year kingdom on earth, there will be a seven-year tribulation period that ends with the bodily return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Some time prior to the beginning of that seven year tribulation period (perhaps immediately before it begins) Jesus will rapture His church and both the dead and living in Christ at that time will be caught up to meet and forever be with the Lord. While we wait with eager expectation for the any moment rapture of the church, we also believe that speculation about when Christ will rapture the church is fruitless because it is unknowable for the church. The goal of the believer is to always be ready. Readiness comes in the form of godliness, which in turn is dependent upon knowledge of and fidelity to the Word of God as well reliance upon the empowering of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.