

What we are all about - the whole counsel of God's Word.

As we are in between books of the Bible, coming out of Ephesians going into Philippians, it seemed good to me to reorient on one of the core distinctives of our church and our particular place within the larger church.

[1Co 12:4-6 NKJV] 4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

I believe this is true of the local church and the universal church.

Each member has its part, its God-given gift, for the edification of the body as a whole.

I want to be very clear about that because although our role in the kingdom may look a little different from somebody else's role in the kingdom we are all to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

We are not looking down our noses at other churches because we are all part of the same Body - Christ's Body.

Our fundamental focus as one local expression of the church, for God's glory, is the systematic, consecutive exposition of the scriptures.

Put simply we believe in and are focused on verse by verse, chapter by chapter, Bible teaching so that we may with confidence and humility declare as Paul declared, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

Now, in my interactions with people in our area when they find out that we have done a church-plant they always want to know two things. The first is, "What denomination are you?" And the second is, "What makes you different?"

Taking these questions in turn I generally explain that we are part of a movement not a denomination called the Calvary Chapel Movement and we are not opposed to denominations either.

Now, in our neck of the woods most people are unfamiliar with Calvary Chapel and so they want to know what we are “most” like so they can get a feel for who we are, what we believe, what a church service looks like.

Typically I will explain that we desire to hold a balanced theology. We are neither charismatic nor liturgical and we do all things decently and in order because God is not the author of confusion but of peace as in all the churches. (1 Cor 14:33; 40)

We place a high-priority on the things that Bible is abundantly clear about and we allow for differing opinions on the things that are ambiguous.

Essentially, we endeavor to keep the main thing the main thing, acknowledging that the main things are the plain things.

That position, filled with wonderfully simple cliches, is born out of the answer to the second common question: “What makes us different?”

Here’s the answer. We believe in the whole counsel of God, the canon of scripture preserved for the saints by God. We believe

that it is uniquely inspired by God, authentic, inerrant, true and the basis for all faith and practice in the life of the Christian. To that end we seek to teach the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, front to back.

Now, whenever I discuss this point with other believers in our area who are plugged into other churches they typically say, “we do that too!” With the implication being - we’re not so different after all.

And honestly, that’s okay! While we acknowledge that God has built, is building His church for his will and glory, we wouldn’t expect to see too terribly stark differences between members of the same Body! After all, we’re all supposed to be reading the same book!

However, there is at least one point that I think bears consideration on what makes us different. When we say that we teach the Bible verse by verse chapter by chapter that’s exactly what we mean.

We consecutively teach through the entirety of scriptures front to back in order. From time to time we will take a break (like this

Sunday) to address a particular topic, but for the most part we diligently move through God's word seeking to know how each verse each chapter shapes us as God pleases.

Now THAT IS a lot different than many churches - many churches typically teach a series of topical sermons meant to address a core topic or tenet of the faith.

This is well intentioned, often well done, and well received, and there is a place for that in the kingdom for sure!

Chuck Smith addresses the danger of that approach in writing upon the Priority of Scripture:

"...when you're preaching topically, you're prone by nature to preach only those topics that you like. There are topics in the Bible that aren't very inspiring and they don't excite people, but they are necessary issues that need to be addressed. When you are preaching topically, the human tendency is to avoid controversial or difficult topics. As a result, people will not gain a well-balanced view of God's truth. So the value of going straight through the Bible is that you can say, 'I have not shunned to

declare to you the whole counsel of God.” (Chuck Smith, Calvary Distinctives)

Now, notice we said the TENDENCY not the certainty. There are great Bible teachers/preachers who regularly preach topical messages.

They are able to deftly and faithfully discern the most pressing need of the Body and they skillfully apply God’s word exactly where and when it is needed.

BUT, the overwhelming tendency for most of us is to seek acceptance rather than putting ourselves in a purposefully uncomfortable position week after week. So there are many who recycle the same crowd-pleasing sermons week after week while ignoring the broader narrative of scripture.

This is done for many reasons not the list of which is because it is safe!

And why not when preaching has been described like this: “The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors. And like the sea, it batters and bruises and does not rest. To preach, to

really preach is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.” -Bruce Thielemann

The problem with that is while those churches centered on crowd-pleasing sermonettes may grow a mile wide, they are sometimes found to be an inch deep.

In its worst, most negligent form, the disciple, yearning for God’s word, is given baby formula week after week, until their teeth rot out of their head and they are no longer able to chew the meat and the bone without hurting themselves!

Looking again at Chuck Smith’s writing on the priority of the Word:

“The seed that falls on good soil will bring forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold’ (Matthew 13:8 NKJV). But it doesn’t happen overnight. This can be rather discouraging when there are those who come in with a flash and a fire and seem to generate an immediate crowd. People throng to see the miracles, to watch the fireworks -- these other guys seem to have instant success. But here you are just plodding along, teaching the Word of God, Genesis through Revelation, and you cannot see much development or growth. But as the Lord said to Daniel, “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). On the Fourth of July it's fun to watch the fireworks, the skyrockets, the blazes of glory, and all the colored sparkles filling the sky. Everybody is "ooing and aahing," but it only lasts for a short time. Before you know it, it's just ashes. It's a big flash and then it's all over. That's the way many ministries are -- just a big flash and then it's over. You have to determine which sky you want to shine in. Do you want to shine as a star forever and ever? Or do you want to be like a skyrocket with a sudden flash, coming on the scene dramatically with no staying power?" (Chuck Smith, *Calvary Distinctives*, p. 58-59)

Now, I am not advocating that each sermon, each Sunday should be a college level exposition of scripture. What we need is balance and a faithfulness to communicate God's word even if those things we are required to teach through make us uncomfortable - or maybe even especially when we are made uncomfortable since that informs us on a point that we are not yet fully in submission to God's word.

I recently heard Sandy Adams say that each sermon should include some milk, some meat, and some manna.

The heart of that sentiment again is balance which is born out of a commitment to the systematic study and teaching of the Bible.

We as a church believe that our purpose is uniquely focused on equipping the saints for the work of ministry, but how shall the saints be equipped if they are lacking the whole counsel of God. (Eph 4:12)

Or, expressed lyrically, “What good is just one note...why pluck one string, when you can strum the guitar?”

In its worst forms our one string approach has led to denominational schism, hyper-charismania, dead orthodoxy, and much more.

Rather, our heart as a church is to “reemphasize the authority of Scripture as the Word of God and the necessity of a personal encounter with the living God of whom it speaks.” (Klein, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation)

To this end we believe in the authority of Scripture and its ability to equip us for every good work, for ministry:

[2Ti 3:16-17 NKJV] 16 All Scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In plainer terms: Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way (2 Tim 3:16 - MSG).

By this we take “all scripture” or every part of Scripture in the literal-historical context that Paul was speaking about to Timothy - namely the OT Scriptures as employed by the early church AND we embrace the prophetic, spiritual aspect that brings the canon of the New Testament scriptures under the umbrella of “all scripture.”

As a matter of fact it appears that at least Peter regarded Paul’s writings as authoritative and on par with the rest of the Scripture already in the hands of the early church when he wrote:

[2Pe 3:15-17 NKJV] 15 and consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, from Paul's writing to Timothy we know that Paul was moved to reaffirm the anchoring point of the believer in God's word in explicit terms.

This is important because while we may espouse the ideal, "we believe that all scripture is God-breathed, inspired, true..." there are some areas of scripture that we very much like to believe or accept on our own terms.

In these cases we make ourselves the arbiters of scriptural truth, we like to form the Bible into our image rather than letting the Scriptures speak for themselves and us being formed by it.

We like to add all sorts of caveats, addendums, restrictions, or magnifications based on our own contextual experience and viewpoints rather than embracing the word as truth.

We find ourselves wrestling with ideas like free-will, election, the gifts of the spirit, etc. by acknowledging that God's word addresses these things in ways that challenge us to our core and we massage them into something more comfortable for our denominational frameworks.

We find ourselves saying things like, "yes, but..." or "what you have to understand is..."

We find then that we accept the authority of the scriptures out of one side of our mouths while denying it out the other side.

May God forgive us in those times and may we lean not on our own understanding -- we are all guilty of this in one form or another.

The next thing we notice about this text is that all scriptures are useful or profitable for a number of purposes.

God's word is not something that we just read, know, and go about our business. It is useful, it is profitable, it is good for us.

But the thing is....we have to read it, know it, to have any value to us. We can't simply look at the closed book on our coffee table or night stand and expect that being nearby will benefit us.

How do we benefit? We gain doctrine/teaching - those foundational truths of our faith that tell us about God the Father, Son, and Spirit; humanity; sin; life; death; heaven; hell and so forth.

We benefit from the rebuke of God's word.

One text reads that this word carries with it the sense, "to state that someone has done wrong, with the implication that there is adequate proof of such wrongdoing." Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 435). New York: United Bible Societies.

And we all say AMEN! God's word brings us face to face with our sin with adequate evidence of our wrong-doing!

More than just stating the sin and bringing us to a place of realization and acknowledgment of our wrong-doing God's word is useful to us for its correction - how to move on, how to repent, what repentance means, and the requirement to be teachable and correctable as we grow in God's word. The aim of God's correcting word is restoration if we will submit to it.

Next we see that the Scriptures are useful for "instruction in righteousness."

This is so important! We are not intrinsically righteous! Any righteousness we possess is the righteousness of Christ awarded to us by grace. So then what does all of that mean? Well...a systematic study of all scripture will enlighten us to what imputed righteousness is and what that means.

You will notice that all of these topics we are discussing are big topics! It is through continued faithful study, searching the scriptures, that we come to a deeper understanding over time as the Holy Spirit guides and instructs us.

Now...finally we see the application of the whole thing and the why of the scriptures... “so that the person of God may be complete/capable/proficient for every good work.”

God’s Word is moving! I mean that in more than just an emotional sense. God’s word equips us and moves us to do the works of our Father.

We are not to simply be snooty know-it-alls who can dominate at Bible trivia but people who, being grasped by the reality and truth of God’s word move forward in our duty to our Lord by His word for the sake of others - to work goodness.

You see there is a danger in our movement that has assailed many of the “back to the Bible” movements over time - dead orthodoxy.

While we focus on teaching the entire counsel of God some sluggardly saints wish for nothing more than to hear, to know, and to sit.

I have seen my fair share of saints who know everything and yet can't muster the spiritual courage to share their faith or simply invite somebody to church!

At the risk of over-simplifying - I would rather work alongside the saint that knows one thing, the love of Jesus, who is a true worker in the kingdom than to sit alongside that slothful saint whom knowledge has puffed up and doesn't do anything!

Consider the dear Apostle Andrew at the very beginning of his faith: [Jhn 1:40-41 NLT] 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. 41 Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ").

What did Andrew know? Well, we don't know how much of Jesus Andrew knew at all!? We know that he heard John the Baptist teach, we know he followed Jesus, and that was enough to compel Andrew to share this news about the messiah - their hope, Jesus, with his brother Peter.

We must be on guard to not slip into a sleepy haze of routine and intellectualism as we remain committed to this holy word.

Paul address this to some extent in the verses following our text -

[2Ti 4:1-5 NLT] 1 I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: 2 Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. 3 For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will reject the truth and chase after myths. 5 But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you.

Did you catch all of that? On the heels of affirming the importance of God's word Paul sets forth the charge to preach that same word.

He warns that the time will come when people won't want to hear that word but would rather build up a team of preachers to teach them lies - they will reject the truth!

Look around! Church shopping is common! It is all too easy for people to find a place identifying as a church while denying the core tenets of the church that will tell them exactly what they want to hear to confirm their own rightness even if it's not aligned with God's word!

This same warning appears in several other places - in Acts 20, 2 Peter 2; Jude.

The general sense in these portions of scripture is that God's word has been declared, it is true, and yet others will twist it, pervert it, or outright deny it as true.

Nevertheless we are to press on, to teach truth, to declare the whole counsel of God, come what may.

That's what we are committed to. We pray for all of those churches who are in this with us! We pray for the Body corporate pursuing good works in obedience to God's word. We pray for endurance. Let God's word be enough.