

THE HEART OF CALVARY CHAPEL

EPHESIANS 2:10

It happens more than you think...

A woman on a flight to *Oakland*, California ended up in *Auckland*, New Zealand. The gate agent casually glanced at her boarding pass. It was a costly mistake.

A Bethesda, Maryland man was headed to *Granada*, Spain - when 20 minutes into his flight he realized he was flying to the West Indies island of *Grenada*.

A grandpa and grandson in Amsterdam were planning to vacation in *Sydney, Australia*. And they arrived in Sydney - but when they exited the plane they found themselves in *Sydney, Nova Scotia* - in Canada.

Of course, the moral of the story is clear, before you board a plane make sure you know where it's headed.

And the same is true with a church!

Check your boarding pass - make sure your church and its leaders are headed in the proper direction!

Today and next time, I want to talk about our church - *our values and our destination*. We want you to get onboard! *We don't just come to church, we are the church*. That's why you need to be part of a church you believe in, a church you can cheer, support, and serve.

Obviously, our church is part of a family of churches called "*Calvary Chapel*" - and though each Calvary is autonomous we share certain values and approaches.

This is what I want to discuss with you this AM.

Our text today is Ephesians 2:10. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The word translated “workmanship” is the Greek word “poema” - from which we get our word *poem*.

As individual believers we’re God’s *work of art*. His masterpiece. His own unique and special creation!

Like a poet who organizes his words with rhyme and meter - or a sculptor who molds the clay - or a composer who arranges notes - God is shaping us into *a sonnet of salvation - an ode to His amazing grace!*

And not only are we as individual Christians *a poema*. I believe that Calvary Chapel is also *a poema - a work of God* - special and unique for these last days.

It was birthed first through Chuck Smith and the first CC in Southern California - and now it’s been birthed over and over through CC pastors all around the world.

Years ago when we started our church I wanted to be part of a fellowship that was as close to the church in the book of Acts as I could find - *simple yet powerful!*

My search led me to Pastor Chuck and CC.

Our goal has never been just to plant a big church, but to be a certain type of church. We’ve tried to be true to *the model in Acts*, and *the poema* we call “CC.”

This AM let me lay out for you **twelve approaches** *that when taken together* make up the heart of CC...

Here they are... our approach to grace, to people, to children, to worship, to the Scriptures, to church doctrine, to the Holy Spirit, to membership, to ministry, to money, to church government, and to the rapture...

If we were like every other church in our community, *why take up space?* We'd be better off closing our doors and throwing in with someone else. But God makes different types of churches to reach different types of people. And He has a unique purpose for us!

First, recognize CC's approach to the grace of God.

John 1:17 tells us, "the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus..."

Grace is the *unmerited and undeserved favor of God*. I like the phrase, "It's love that's on the house!"

God's grace was paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus, and comes to us freely. God *saves us* and *blesses us* not because of our good works, or our religious deeds, but for no other reason than His amazing grace.

When I come to Jesus He takes me *just as I am*, and *right where I'm at*. He plants His Spirit in my life, and works in me from the inside out. It's not up to me to *do this* or *do that*, but to cooperate with His Holy Spirit.

Grace and works are mutually exclusive ways of approaching God. You can't trust in grace to *obtain* God's favor; then trust in your own works to *maintain it*.

It's one or the other. Galatians 3:3 says it best. If you begin in the Spirit, don't try to be made perfect in the flesh - or with your own hard work and elbow grease.

The churches I grew up in hammered us weekly about what we should and shouldn't be doing for God - the *dos and don'ts*. The theme was *try, try, try...*

But as you read the NT you find its emphasis is not on what *we should be doing for God*, but on what *God has already done for us*. The theme is *trust, trust, trust!*

I grow spiritually not by striving to be righteousness through my own efforts - but by realizing I'm already as right with God as I can get through Jesus. 1 John 4:19 tells us, "**We love Him, because He first loved us.**"

God's grace is what supplies me the incentive to be holy, to witness, to serve, to love my neighbor. The more I realize God loves me the more I'll love Him in return. A Calvary distinctive is an emphasis on grace!

Which leads to the CC approach **to people**.

We want our church to be *a grace place!*

Grace is more than a line on a doctrinal statement, it should characterize the way we treat one another. If God loves each of us *just as we are and right where we're at* - then that's how we should love one another.

In 1 Samuel 16:7 the prophet was told, "**The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**"

God doesn't look at the *color of our skin*, or the *cut of our hair*, or the *clothes that we wear*. God looks behind the veneer - the facade - and God sees the heart.

And this is how we should treat each other.

God's love transcends racial, and cultural, and economic barriers. It's *grace* for every *race*.

Grace picks up people despite their background or problems - it elevates us as children of God - it forgives and fixes us - then it unites us in a common future.

Heaven will be a hodge-podge of people. And the church today should reflect the same demographics.

One of the distinctives of a CC is a warmth and acceptance for all people. Hopefully, anybody - from any walk of life, or situation, or political persuasion can walk through our doors and sense God's love for them.

The first Calvary in Costa Mesa began in the mid-60s when the people reached out to the counter-cultural Hippies that had flocked to Southern California.

And CC has been reaching out to disenfranchised folks every since. Here's what happens in *a grace place*... folks who aren't accepted anywhere else, become accepted - people who aren't love, get loved...

Remember, on the night before His crucifixion Jesus told His followers that the world will know we're His disciples by our love for one another. 1 Corinthians 13 teaches us that the greatest of God's gifts is love!

And while we're talking about people - *let's talk about CC's approach to the little people - to our children.*

Once, the disciples made the mistake of thinking their Master was too busy for kids. When they turned the children away Jesus rebuked them. He said, "*Allow the little children to come to Me.*" *Jesus loves kids!*

In our Children's Ministry - from nursery up to MS - we try to create an environment where learning is fun.

One thing is certain, the kids are definitely loved.

This AM I want to mention Marsha Martin. She's served in our nursery for nearly 20 years. Her commitment to the next generation is priceless. And she's one of many volunteers who serve in our CM.

Here's our belief, because Jesus loves children we need to muster the effort to teach them on their own level. We want our children looking forward to church.

This is why we run our CM simultaneous with our adult worship and Bible Study. It spares the kid's the boredom of an adult service, and provides a worship experience that's fun - at time to which kids can relate.

One Sunday, Kathy was out of town, and I brought my three oldest kids to church. Nick was just a kindergartener, but he was mature for his age. I thought he could sit next to me during the service.

Man, was I wrong! As I started teaching he launched his paper airplane. With each pass its flight pattern grew larger and larger. Before long he was in the floor buzzing the altar with that airplane - *as I tried to teach.*

I wanted to ignore him, but I couldn't. I interrupted my own message, walked over to him, and sent him to the foyer until I was finished. *And that morning did it for me...* God made preschoolers to learn by exploration.

We're fighting against God to expect a child to sit still for an adult-oriented service. Yes, the kids can distract the adults, but more importantly it's unfair to the kids!

When I was a child the church we attended had the traditional format - kids and parents attended in the sanctuary side-by-side... *And here's what happened...*

The parents devised little ways to hold their child's attention. We played tic-tac-toe... we counted ceiling tiles, or folks in the choir... Not only were the parents unable to pay attention, but without realizing it they taught their kids how to come to church and not listen.

So by the time the kids got to the age where they could glean from the sermon, they were already conditioned to ignore what was being said. It was tragic. We want our kids to be excited about church!

And speaking of our Sunday services, let's talk next about our approach **to worship**. The Bible tells us the whole purpose of our existence is to worship God. We should tell God that we love Him, and sing His praise!

In worshipping and glorifying God, humans not only please God's heart, but find their greatest fulfillment.

Realize, we have nothing against a choir. In fact, oftentimes we organize choirs for special occasions.

Right now, we're planning for a children's choir.

But we want to avoid the impression that exists in some circles, that the choir constitutes the singers, and the congregation the listeners. At CC, the whole congregation is the choir, and God is our audience!

And He's not tough critic. He loves a joyful noise!

Of course, we do have worship leaders, but their job is to direct us to God. That's why they close their eyes. *It's not because we're ugly and it hurts to look at us.* It's because they're trying to direct their songs to God.

We want our worship to be personal and passionate. We're not *just singing* - we're expressing our heart.

The Bible also tells us to sing a "new song."

The *same ole same ole* becomes mundane and loses its luster. That's why we're always interjecting new tunes. At times we go overboard, but we're trying.

And here's another conviction in regards to worship, our expression needs to be *voluntary and natural*.

Worship should rise spontaneously from an attitude of *awe*, and *wonder*, and *gratitude*, and *adoration*.

If a worship leader has to trump it up, or hype up the people to worship - it becomes a flawed sacrifice.

It needs to flow from *our hearts* to *God's throne*.

Which leads to CC's approach **to the Scriptures**. We believe the Bible is divine truth, not human opinion.

It's inspired by the Holy Spirit - inerrant in the original writings - immutable in all that it teaches - preserved through the centuries for us and future generations.

"But Sandy, what about modern attitudes toward sexuality, and gender roles? Doesn't the Bible need an overhaul?" My answer is simple... *do you really think we've gotten smarter than God?* His truth is timeless!

The Bible doesn't need an upgrade for modern sensibilities, it needs to be rightly understood and fearlessly obeyed. **Methods change - not the message.**

At CC we don't just treat the Bible as some religious relic... we open it - and turn its pages - and read its words - and dive into its meaning - and apply it to life.

Tragically, the world today - even the church - suffers from an acute biblical illiteracy. Many Christians are ignorant of the book they supposedly cherish.

The average believer today knows a few Bible stories and a couple of random verses, but they lack a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures.

It's obvious, the church has not been doing its job.

As a pastor **I need to teach the Book, the whole Book, and nothing but the Book, so help me God!**

It was AW Tozer who said, **"Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian."** One of a CC's priorities is the systematic study of the Bible.

I once received a letter from a member of our church. It was one of those encouraging notes that a pastor holds on to, and pulls out on his difficult days...

At one point the letter read, **"Thank you for teaching God's Word and not a lot of other stuff."** I appreciated the compliment - but quite frankly, I don't know what a pastor teaches who doesn't teach God's Word.

The CC approach is to teach the Bible *verse by verse, chapter by chapter, cover to cover*. In our years as a church we've been through the Bible four times...

Last week we relaunched our Sunday night **Through The Bible Study!** Tonight we're covering Isaiah 4-6.

Here's where I'm at, I love you! I want you to come on Sunday nights and learn God's Word. It's changed my life and it'll change yours. In fact, there's no short-cuts. Faith grows when we study the Word of God.

But whether you come or not, at the end of the day I want to be sure I can stand before God and join with the Apostle Paul when he said, **"I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."** I'm providing you the opportunity. What you do with it is up to you.

Which brings up CC's approach **to church doctrine.**

Just because we're *nondenominational* that doesn't mean we don't know what we believe. We want to be contemporary in our methods, but traditional in beliefs.

In fact, we affirm all the historic doctrines of the Christianity: **the Bible's inerrancy - God's triune nature - that God created all things - the deity of Jesus - His atoning death and bodily resurrection - salvation by grace through faith - the power of the Holy Spirit - the rapture of the Church - the second coming of Jesus.**

On these crucial doctrines we remain dogmatic and unbending. Yet there're other areas of Christian doctrine where we're more flexible... Does *God elect* or do we *choose*? We believe the Bible teaches both.

We get into trouble when we try to reconcile the two positions rather than *accept them "as is."* Some truths are revealed because they eclipse reason. God doesn't tell us to cipher it all out, but to believe what He says.

This is why the best theology isn't some man-made system, but a working knowledge of the Book that develops as we immerse ourselves in God's Word.

I like the old adage, “In the essentials, unity. In the nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.” Remember, nobody has perfect theology. Thus, humility is needed.

Paul said, “We see as in a mirror, dimly...” We’re all still growing in our knowledge of God and His Word.

Let’s be tolerant and give each other room to grow.

Once, during a baptism I had an older lady ask me if she could be sprinkled. She was uneasy about going under the water. I didn’t think it was God’s will to cause a woman to have a heart attack, so I sprinkled her.

What mattered most was her desire to identify with Jesus... *Yet we all know that churches have split, and denominations have formed, over this very issue.*

At CC we believe that Jesus is the *main thing*... and our goal is to keep the *main thing* the *main thing*.

In the nonessentials we need to learn to *disagree agreeably*, and not break fellowship over trivial matters.

And while we’re talking about doctrine, let me explain our approach **to the Holy Spirit**. Certainly, we believe the Spirit of God is at work in the world today.

In the Gospels, Jesus spoke of three experiences a believer can have with the Holy Spirit... In John 14 Jesus said He’s **with us** and **in us**. He’s *with us* before we come to Christ. He convicts us of sin, and points us to the Savior... He dwells *in us* at our conversion, to cleanse us and transform us into the image of Jesus...

But there’s a third experience we can have... In Acts 1:8 Jesus also said the Spirit would come *upon us!*

This is what occurred on the Day of Pentecost, and afterwards, the Holy Spirit baptized the disciples with *great grace*, and made them *bold witnesses* for Jesus.

The experience was an outpouring of spiritual empowerment - and accompanied by spiritual gifts.

At CC we seek the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe the baptism of the Spirit, and His supernatural enablings, are still available to believers today.

And as with all God's gifts, they're received by faith.

Yet the question arises, where should these spiritual gifts be exercised? *For example the gift of tongues...*

We believe in tongues. It's a beautiful gift given by God as a means of praising Him in an uninhibited way.

But here's where our approach is both balanced and biblical... *First of all, will everyone speak in tongues?*

In 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 Paul uses a series of rhetorical questions, "Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?... Do all speak with tongues?"

The obvious answer is "no." Not everyone has the same spiritual gifts - not everyone speak in tongues.

And second, should the gift of tongues be exercised in the church's Sunday morning public assembly?

This time, 1 Corinthians 14, tells us "no." It tells us the gift of tongues is reserved for a person's private devotions, or for a small group of knowledgeable believers. There is a proper place and time for the gifts.

Calvary believes in the gifts of the Spirit, but we also recognize biblical guidelines for the use of these gifts.

We want the fire of experience, but when it rages out of control it burns down the house. It's when *the fire of experience* burns in *the fireplace of Scripture*, that the house is warmed. We want to do church by the Book.

Tragically, in some churches weird stuff occurs in the name of the Spirit of which the Holy Spirit has no part.

In John 15:26 Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me." Notice two points...

First, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. He is the author of God's Word, and that means the Spirit will never do or say anything, that contradicts the Bible.

Second, the Holy Spirit comes not to promote Himself, but to testify of Jesus. I worry about churches that are preoccupied with the Holy Spirit. My hunch is the Spirit isn't really leading them. If He was, the emphasis would be on Jesus, not the Spirit. A church truly full of the Holy Spirit magnifies and glorifies Jesus.

Another CC distinctive is our approach **to church membership**. In one sense, if you're a member of the body of Christ, you're a member of our church.

We want to embrace anyone who comes to us with a desire to fellowship in Jesus' name. Besides, if God accepts you into His family who are we not to accept you into ours? We acknowledge that there's only *one true Church*, made up of members in *many churches*.

As to a formal membership... we don't have one.

I grew up in a church that had 1000 names on the rolls, but only 300 showed up. Yet we bragged about having 1000 members. At CC we've chosen to just let God take care of the paper work. It really only matters that your name is written one place - the Book of Life.

Understand, CC is a fellowship. On a regional level, we're *a fellowship of churches and pastors*. On a local level, we're *a fellowship of believers*. We're followers of Jesus who voluntarily agree to live in community.

The NT teaches that the church is more than an organization - it's an organism - it's a living, breathing body of believers coming together in Jesus' name.

In the truest sense, you *become a member* of this church, by *being a member* - by participation. My arm is a member of my body because it serves a function - not because it stepped forward and signed a card.

Don't misunderstand, we believe in membership, but it needs to be redefined. You're a member of CC by hanging out with us, growing with us, serving God with us... Stop hanging out, and you stop being a member.

And speaking of serving together, let me mention our approach **to ministry**. In a lot of churches pastors are called "**ministers**" and the people are called "**laity**." That means the pastors do all the *ministering* and the laity just *lay around*. But at CC **every member is a minister!**

Ephesians 4 teaches that the pastor's job is "**to equip the saints for the work of the ministry**." My role is not to do it all myself - but to teach you so you'll be equipped to

reach out and share your faith at home - at work - in the community - on the mission field - in our church.

1 Corinthians 12 likens the Church to the human body. Each member is a part in that body, and has a vital function. We believe you too have a place in this body, and we want to help you discover that role.

But here's a vital principle when it comes to service - involvement in ministry should also be voluntary.

Fruitful ministry comes from the heart, and is led by the Spirit. When people are pressured or badgered into serving - or made to feel guilty if they don't - then they'll serve with strings attached... At CC we don't plead or beg you to help - *even when we need you to help...*

We love people, and teach people, and love people some more... until they're equipped, and willing. We want everyone who serves to do so, not because they feel like they *have to*, but because they *want to*.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "God loves a cheerful giver." And I have found that a church full of cheerful givers is a really fun place to be!

Which brings us to our approach **to money.**

We believe *God's work - done God's way - will never lack God's support.* Pastor Chuck had a saying that I now live by, "Where God guides He provides!"

It's tragic when a pastor misrepresents God as broke and on the verge of bankruptcy - as if God needs help.

God has boundless resources at His disposal.

Let me brag on God a bit... In the 34 years our church has existed we've never passed the plate. We have offering boxes in the back. *You know where they are. You don't need a plate passed under your nose.*

We trust God to put it on your heart to give. And He's seen to it that we've never lacked funds to pay a bill.

Week after week pastors tell people to trust God, but when the church springs a leak they're prone to try and patch it by pleading, and begging, and tightening the screws, and preaching a special sermon on tithing.

Pastors should also trust the Lord!

This is what our leadership tries to do. We recognize you're the ones who drop your offerings in the box. I doubt the angels make too many contributions. But we're looking past you - to the God who prompts you.

I do believe the Bible holds up tithing 10% as a good guideline for our giving. But it also teaches that we're free from law, to walk in the Spirit. Thus, I'm not about to legislate when and how much anyone should give.

The amount, or percentage, or destination of your gift is none of my business. Besides, if I were to insist on you giving 10% - God may tell you to give 15%.

Let's just give as the Lord leads. *God has given us so much, how can we not give back a portion to Him?* And the more we give - the more He gives in return.

Giving is like serving, it should be done because people **want to**, not because we feel like we **have to**.

Again, "God loves a cheerful giver!"

A person once asked me, “*Sandy, I can’t believe you guys don’t take an offering. You must have one extremely, wealthy backer funding your church.*” I said, “Aw, you’ve figured us out. His name is Jesus Christ.”

Another CC distinctive is our approach **to church government**. When it comes to church leadership we believe in **servant leadership**. That the highest ranking person should be the servant of all. Humility is a must.

In some churches the people look to their pastor as a status symbol. They want him to live at the rung on the social ladder to which they aspire. The Jews wanted the same of Jesus - they tried to make Him their king.

But Jesus refused elevation. He kept insisting on the lowest role. And He expects His *leaders* to be *servants*.

The people of this church don’t exist to serve the pastors. It’s the pastors that are here for the people.

When it comes to government, realize the Church is not **a democracy - run by the people**. Nor is it **a monarchy - run by the pastor**. It’s **a theocracy - run by God’s Spirit**. This means its leaders should be on their knees seeking God for direction. While the followers are on their knees asking God to bless their leaders.

And under the headship of Jesus we believe the biblical structure of church leadership involves three groups - the **pastors**, the **elders**, and the **deacons**...

First, **the pastor** is responsible to feed and lead.

One day God will hold me responsible for the spiritual nourishment and direction of CC. Thus, I need the freedom to *hear from God*, and to *follow God*.

Throughout the Bible - from Moses to Peter - God chose men. He anointed a man - not a committee - not a caucus - and He led His people through that servant leader. CCs believe in strong pastoral leadership.

The idea of *democracy* - that everyone votes - is an American idea - but it's not God's plan for His Church.

Realize, a pastor isn't a hired-hand - an employee of the church. He's a shepherd who loves the flock.

If you want a hired-hand fine, but at the first sign of trouble he'll abandon the sheep. It's just a job to him...

Yet a shepherd loves the sheep. He makes sacrifices, and takes risks, and lays down his life for the sheep. You want your pastor to be a shepherd!

In the church pastors need to lead. But they don't do so in a vacuum... They're assisted by **the elders** who help oversee the spiritual needs of God's people...

And **the deacons** - men and women who serve the church in practical ways. The deacons are "**designated doers**" - "**select servants.**" They lead by example.

To me the church has made a mistake through the centuries in being dogmatic about church structure, while compromising the quality of the leaders who fill that structure. Our attitude should be just the opposite.

We should be flexible and practical with our structure, but we should never drop the bar on the spiritual qualifications of the leaders we get involved.

Finally, let me touch on the CC approach **to the rapture**. It's a big deal to us. *We plan to participate!*

We believe that Jesus has promised to return in the clouds and airlift His Church into the presence of God.

The Bible promises that those who are in Christ will be “**saved from the wrath to come.**” **Before God's judgment comes down, the Church will go up.**

And we believe Jesus can return for us at any time! Theologians call this the doctrine of **Imminence**.

This is why we believe the rapture occurs before the final seven years of Great Tribulation. Any other timeline and it means something else happens first.

Under other scenarios you're no longer *looking for Jesus Christ... but for the Antichrist*. Heaven forbid!

We believe the Bible wants us to look to Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:8 promises a special crown to all who love the Lord's appearing. The pre-trib rapture is more than an eschatological theory, it's our “**blessed hope.**”

And it has a purifying effect. Knowing He can return at any moment keeps us on the edge of our seat.

It keeps us from getting bogged down in this world. His imminent return fixes our heart on eternity.

In conclusion, let me admit that this CC, or any CC, is not a perfect church. We have our shortcomings and deficiencies... And I'm certainly not the perfect pastor!

If you know me, you realize how true that really is!

We're just believers hanging on to Jesus. We're saved by grace. But by grace God is redeeming our dignity as His children, and shaping us into His image.

The one thing we really want to be is genuine.

And now that you know *who we are* and *what we value* - I hope you'll climb on board! Make this church your church. Help us be *God's poema - His work of art!*

Together, we are God's **“workmanship!”**