

UNIQUE & UNIFIED

THE CALVARY CHAPEL DISTINCTIVES

Part Five, the last of a series on the Calvary Chapel Distinctives. This issue includes The Rapture of the Church and Striking the Balance. This article was edited by permission and condensed from Calvary Chapel Distinctives by the late Pastor Chuck Smith. All Scripture is from the King James Version.

The Rapture of the Church

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

TITUS 2:13

The Rapture refers to that time when Jesus is going to come, without warning, and take away His church from this earth. After the Rapture, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon this sinful world. Jesus promised He would come again when He said, **Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also** (John 14:1-3).

I believe that God's divine design is for the church to live in constant expectancy of the Lord's return. Believing this has a three-fold effect. First, it gives us an urgency for the work that we are doing, to get the Gospel out. Secondly, it gives us a correct perspective of material things. Recognize that the material world is passing away and only those things that are eternal will last. Thirdly, it reminds us to maintain purity in our lives. I don't want the Lord to come and find me cruising pornographic sites on the Internet. The Lord could come today!

There are people who say, "I don't believe in the Rapture of the church," because they have looked through the Bible and have never found the word *Rapture*. But in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 we read the words *caught up*. The translation of *caught up* in the Greek is *harpazo*, which means "to be taken away by force." The *Latin Vulgate*

translates *harpazo* as *rapiemur*, and that's where we get our English word *rapture*. Jesus will return to rapture His church. That's the first event. The second event is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when He comes again with His church to establish His kingdom upon the earth. The Rapture is a distinct, separate event preceding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Rapture can take place at any time. As far as the Second Coming, there are some prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled before Jesus comes again. The Antichrist must be revealed, and the earth must go through a time of great tribulation and judgment. I believe the forces and power of the Antichrist are in the world today, and the only thing keeping them from taking over is the presence of the church.

The church is not appointed unto wrath. It simply isn't consistent with the nature of God to judge the righteous with the wicked. In Romans 5:9, Paul tells us, **Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.** He repeats this in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, **For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.** In Romans 1:18 Paul writes, **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.**

I believe that the hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ is the spark that God has used to bring revival throughout the Church—the fact that we don't have much time. As Paul said, **knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed** (Romans 13:11b).

Striking the Balance

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

An important characteristic of Calvary Chapel fellowships is the desire not to divide God's people over non-essential issues. This isn't to say that our convictions are weak. When the Bible speaks clearly, we must as well. But on other issues we try to recognize the Scriptural validity of both sides of a debate and avoid excluding or favoring one camp over the other.

In the essential doctrines of the faith, we must take a firm stand. But as far as the non-essential areas, in the spirit of grace we accept that people may have differing views. It's important to recognize that we can agree to disagree and still maintain a spirit of unity and love. An example of this is in our approach to the debatable issue concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We don't take a typical Pentecostal view nor a typical Baptist view. The minute we set our position one way or the other, we have lost half our congregation. Our desire is to be able to minister to as broad a group of people as possible. The minute we start taking hardline positions on any of the non-foundational controversial issues, we alienate part of the people.

If people want to speak in tongues, we encourage them to do so in a private devotional setting to assist in communicating their love, praises, and prayers to God. We look to 1 Corinthians 14 as our biblical example. We don't insist that a person speak in tongues as the primary evidence of

the baptism of the Holy Spirit—we believe there are other evidences that are more credible than speaking in tongues, such as showing the love of Christ (1 Corinthians 13:1).

The eternal security of the believer is a debatable issue at best. There are Scriptures on both sides. There are people who are always trying to pigeonhole Calvary Chapel. Do we believe in eternal security? I say, "Yes. As long as I abide in Christ, I'm eternally secure." Can one have security outside of Jesus Christ? I don't know of any security outside of Jesus Christ. But as long as I abide in Him, He's going to keep me from falling, to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. And no man can pluck me out of His hand.

I believe that Scripture teaches both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man regarding salvation. If I take either of these positions to an extreme, to the denying of the other, then I've got a real problem because the Scriptures teach both. But then you might ask, "How can we reconcile them?" I don't. God just asked me to believe. As you begin to minister, as you go through the Word, you will come across those Scriptures that speak of the sovereignty of God. When you do, teach it. When you come across those Scriptures that teach the responsibility of man, then teach that. In that way, you can be sure that you are feeding the people a well-balanced spiritual diet. ✍

“The church is not appointed unto wrath. It simply isn't consistent with the nature of God to judge the righteous with the wicked.”

Pastor Chuck Smith